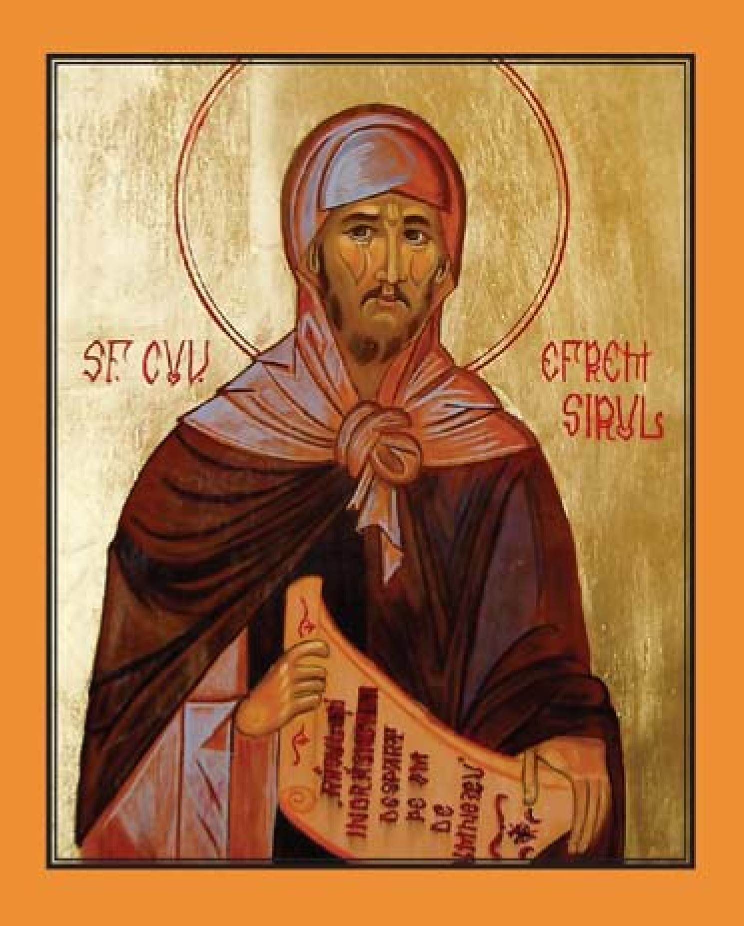
CHORBISHOP SEELY JOSEPH BEGGIANI



EARLY SYRIAC THEOLOGY

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE MARONITE TRADITION

REVISED EDITION

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IN MEMORY

of my parents, Joseph and Sada Beggiani

CONTENTS

PREFACE

The pluralism advocated in the Catholic Church today is a reflection of a similar variety of worldviews in its origins. The Eastern churches as well as the Western church are the ongoing representatives of the cultures and worldviews of peoples of the first few centuries after Christ who first responded to the gospels. The development of theology within each of these various traditions has its own history and was affected by external and internal factors and events.

This work, as the title suggests, has a dual purpose. It began as a project to formulate an early Syriac theology, specifically of St. Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh. While Syriac literature can be traced to the earliest centuries, it is with the writings of St. Ephrem that we have the full blossoming of a comprehensive Syriac theology. Early Syriac theology was Semitic and biblical in its worldview. While cognizant of Greek culture and philosophy, it steered clear at first from Greek influence.

This work, first of all, presents a complete but concise synthesis of the theology of St. Ephrem. It claims that Ephrem had a coherent worldview of all aspects of the plan of salvation, which his many writings consistently affirm. It also includes the liturgical theological thought of Jacob of Serugh. While Jacob wrote many decades after Ephrem, many of his ideas were strongly influenced by Ephrem and often reflected Ephrem's worldview. He tried at times to reconcile Ephrem's

thought with Greek ideas of the cosmos. However, Greek views regarding creation and anthropology did not have as broad an influence on Jacob's thought as they did on his Christology, which could be characterized as Cyrillian.[1] Since our interest is primarily liturgical theology, we will not be dealing with the controversy regarding Jacob of Serugh's orthodoxy. We consider him as perhaps the last major representative of Syriac religious literature prior to its being influenced by Greek thought in a major way. As my research continued, it became obvious that the Maronite liturgy, by coincidence or by direct historical influence, reflected extensively the themes developed by Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh. The second purpose of this work is to show how a Maronite theology can be delineated through citations from the Maronite liturgy.

Citations from the Maronite liturgy in this book, unless indicated otherwise, are taken from *Lectionary: Syriac-Maronite Church; The Seasons* (Detroit: Diocese of St. Maron, 1976) and *Qurbono: The Book of Offering* (Brooklyn: Saint Maron, 1994); *Anaphora Book of the Syriac Maronite Church of Antioch* (Youngstown: Diocese of St. Maron, 1978); *Fenqitho: A Treasury of Feasts According to the Syriac Maronite Church of Antioch* (Youngstown: Diocese of St. Maron, 1980); *The Prayer of the Faithful According to the Liturgical Year*, 3 vols., translated from *Prière du croyant selon l'année liturgique maronite,* edited by Boutros Gemayel (Brooklyn: Diocese of St. Maron, 1985); *Mysteries of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Communion; According to the Maronite Antiochene Church* (Brooklyn: Diocese of St. Maron, 1987); *The Mystery of Crowning: According to the Maronite Antiochene Church* (Brooklyn: Diocese of St. Maron, 1991); *Book*

1. Tanios Bou Mansour, *La théologie de Jacques de Saroug,* vol. 1, *Création, anthropologie, ecclésiologie et sacraments* (Kaslik, Lebanon: Université de Saint-Esprit, 1993), 306. Benham M. Boulos Sony observes that the great Greek anthropological themes are hardly glimpsed in the thought of Jacob; Sony, "L'anthropologie de Jacques de Saroug," *Parole de l'Orient* 12 (1984–85): 153–85, at 185.

of Offering: According to the Rite of the Antiochene Syriac Maronite Church (Brooklyn: Eparchy of St. Maron of Brooklyn, 2012).

Historically, the Maronite Church can trace its origins to ancient Syria, followed by its eventual establishment in Lebanon. Juridically it situates itself in the See of Antioch. On the other hand, the development of the Maronite liturgical tradition is more complex. As we shall note, Maronite liturgy, along with the Antiochene tradition, may have had its origins in the ancient rite of Edessa. It later underwent inroads from Latin influences.

The problem in constructing a Maronite theology is the dearth of actual theological sources. Until recent decades, whatever theological works were available were often adaptations or translations from Latin works into Syriac and Arabic. Latinization of the Maronite Church started with the Crusades and became more intense beginning in the sixteenth century. On the other hand, if Maronite theological works were written prior to the Latin period, they have not survived. In attempting to formulate a Maronite theology, one cannot deal with specifically theological sources, but rather should examine the rich treasures to be found in the divine liturgy and the divine office. In fact, a special feature of Maronite worship is the "prayer of incense" ("*sedro*" or "hoosoyo"), which usually expresses theologically either the events of salvation history or the meaning of the sacraments/mysteries being celebrated.

While the Maronite liturgy underwent Latinization, a close study reveals that the Latinizations were mainly accidental and regarding externals. The content of the Maronite missals prior to the reforms after Vatican II reflect the ancient Syriac culture. While the pre-reform ritual for baptism has obvious Latinizations, its content reflects the thought of Jacob of Serugh. Its anaphora for the blessing of the baptismal water reflects the ancient practice.

While this work does not go into a manuscript or textual study of the history of the Maronite liturgy, it presumes that the Maronite liturgy today is a faithful representative of the Syriac tradition of Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh.

The Syriac authors that we are studying did not express themselves with rational speculation or through systematization, but rather by paradox and the use of a range of symbols and biblical typology. With roots in Judeo-Christianity, their theology was fundamentally biblical in thought and expression. Sidney Griffith offers important observations regarding Ephrem's approach to theology. He notes that Ephrem did not set about to compose a systematic theology as found in the Greek fathers or the Scholastics. Many of his writings were written for specific occasions or to meet pastoral requirements. They were often composed in liturgical settings. The key to Ephrem's writing "is a poetic style in Syriac diction, coupled with a narrative technique that is allusive in character and elliptical in expression. It alludes to various aspects of an issue under discussion, presuming an audience's familiarity with it, and alludes to scriptural stories and motifs in terms St. Ephraem thinks will bring clarity to a discussion. But he presumes the reader knows the Bible, and that an allusion to a scriptural passage or to an incident in a biblical story will suffice to call a whole pericope to mind."[2]

Sidney Griffith goes further by claiming that Ephrem had a distinctive Syriac linguistic approach in doing theology and arriving at articles of faith. Ephrem's approach was not academic, but employed the popular literary genres of religious piety. He relies on the extensive use of scripture and on analogies from

2. Sidney H. Griffith, "'Faith Seeking Understanding' in the Thought of St. Ephraem the Syrian," in *Faith Seeking Understanding: Learning and the Catholic Tradition,* edited by George C. Berthold, 37–38 (Manchester, N.H.: St. Anselm College Press, 1991).

nature. According to Griffith, Ephrem thought that the "academic methodology of his day . . . was a methodological mistake if one expected to derive information about God." Rather, instead of inquiry or research or disputation, one should stand in silence and faith. The primary purpose of human speech is to give praise to God.[3]

Griffith concludes that just because Ephrem did not use speculative thinking to clarify the truths of faith does not mean that he did not seek deeper knowledge. "In fact, he sought to have the mysteries enlighten one another by making them subjects of an extended meditation in verse and song, in a contemplative style that was the preferred mode of intellectual life for Syriac-speaking persons, the genius of whose language found its most natural expressions in literary genres that prized wonder over prosaic analysis."[4]

In view of this, our attempts to systematize the thought of Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh can be only partially successful. The use of such categories as God, creation, revelation, incarnation are not always adequate to the task and involve overlapping, but is done out of convenience. Often where the thought of our writers defied systematization, I have resorted to lengthy citations or paraphrases.

This revised edition is not a comprehensive one. Included are significant clarifications in the preface, additional material on some of the theological themes treated, and additional citations from the Maronite liturgy. It gives further evidence that the Maronite tradition is consistently representative of the theological expression of the early Syriac writers.

The author wishes to express his thanks to the Most Reverend Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of St. Maron of Brooklyn, for his encouragement and support.

3. Ibid., 39–41, 43–45.
4. Ibid., 50.

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INTRODUCTION

The Syriac World in General

In formulating this survey of Syriac theology we are directing our study to that body of thought that grew out of the Syriac culture and language. However, the Syriac world was not homogenous. It extended from Antioch to Nisibis and the Eastern regions. Antioch was a center of Greek culture while possessing a Syriac substratum; Nisibis and the East were embedded in Judeo-Christianity and ancient Persian beliefs.

Sebastian Brock tells us that at the beginning of the Christian era a number of dialects of Aramaic developed, of which Syriac was the local dialect of Edessa and its province of Osrhoene. Syriac was to achieve the status of a literary language, since it was adopted as the vehicle for the spread of Christianity in the East.[1]

Robert Murray describes the "Syriac area" as referring to northern Mesopotamia and Adiabene, the province to the east. He notes that a large number of scholars claim that Edessa was the "cradle of Syriac Christianity." Syriac Christianity manifests origins in a thoroughly Jewish form of Christianity, although much Syriac literature contains anti-Jewish writings. He concludes by characterizing the Christianity of Aphrahat and

1. Sebastian Brock, "Greek into Syriac and Syriac into Greek," *Journal of the Syriac Academy* 3 (1977): 1.

Ephrem as a "breakaway movement among the Jewish community of Adiabene."[2]

While the Syrian region of the fourth and fifth centuries formed an ethnic and geographic whole, it was divided on a cultural level into two parts. West Syria was bilingual, speaking both Syriac and Greek in its large population centers, and was influenced by Hellenistic culture. While Antioch as a center of Hellenism had a great influence, the countryside resisted and preserved to a great degree its Semitic culture.

East Syria preserved its Semitic heritage and resisted Greek influence. In between West and East was the province of Osrhoene and its capital, Edessa. The school of Edessa took pride in its Syriac culture, but nevertheless translated into Syriac many of the works of Greek philosophy.[3]

While Plato is found in Syriac chiefly by a number of apocryphal sayings transmitted under his name, much of Aristotle was translated into Syriac before being translated into Arabic. Porphyry is known in Syriac through his introduction to the *Organon.*[4]

Aphrahat and Ephrem — Heirs of Judeo-Christianity

As noted, authors such as Aphrahat and Ephrem arose from the milieu of Judeo-Christianity. It was the main influence on their thought. If one looks for specific sources, one can be sure only of the sacred scriptures. Robert Murray observes that if Aphrahat had one book besides the Bible it was probably a Syriac translation of the *Didascalia.*[5]

St. Ephrem as an exegete seems to be influenced by a mid-

2. Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 5–8.

3. Gabriel Khouri-Sarkis, "Introduction aux églises de langue syriaque," *L'Orient Syrien* l (1956): 7–8.

4. Brock, "Greek into Syriac," 7.

5. Murray, *Symbols,* 337.

rashic approach and hermeneutical practice that is Jewish in origin. In dealing with Old Testament themes, he manifests haggadic characteristics. However, he is also a representative of the *theoria* approach of the Antiochene school of scriptural interpretation.[6] He distinguishes the literal sense from the scriptural.

The Establishment of Separate Church and Liturgical Traditions

In various areas of the Christian world, diversity of cultures and customs led to the establishment of various churches. The more highly developed local cultures became the vehicles of sophisticated traditions. In addition, those "see" cities that claimed to be apostolic and located in large urban centers of civil administration established themselves as seats of ecclesiastical government. It is in these areas that the various patriarchates developed.[7] A similar situation developed in the Syriac region.

Robert Taft notes that the East has never known the separation of spirituality, theology, and ecclesiology from liturgy. On the other hand, differences in culture and customs were bound to have an influence on worship. Gabriel Khouri-Sarkis observes that liturgy is the living expression and soul of the people who pray. It is an integrating part of this people, its traditions its affective needs, whether moral or intellectual.[8] The formation of the church of the East and the Syrian Orthodox Church were also factors in the establishment of the diverse churches and liturgical traditions.[9]

From the point of view of liturgical history, William Macomber has theorized that the liturgical situation of the Syriac

6. Tryggve Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1–11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1978), 26–27.

7. Robert Taft, "The Continuity of Tradition in a World of Liturgical Change: The Eastern Liturgical Experience," *Seminarium* 27 (1975): 451–52.

8. Khouri-Sarkis, "Introduction," 8.

9. Ibid., 8–16.

region around the year 400 was characterized by the presence of at least three rites centered in Antioch, Jerusalem, and Edessa. The first two were in Greek and the last in Syriac. While the Jerusalem rite was limited primarily to Palestine, the rite of Antioch would have been found in the Greek-speaking cities of Syria and as far away as Laodicea and Mopsuestia. The rite of Edessa would have been used in the Syriac-speaking parts of Syria. An interesting development occurred regarding the partisans of Nestorius and the Persian church. While the followers of Nestorius, whether in voluntary or forced exile, had preached through Mesopotamia and Osrhoene and in the regions of east and north Syria, it was really the acceptance of this position by the school of Edessa where the upper Persian clergy were formed that led the major part of Mesopotamia and the church of Persia to separate from communion with Constantinople and constitute the church of the East.

Therefore, while those who did not accept the Council of Ephesus were found in the Greek and Syriac areas of Syria, they were able to organize themselves ecclesiastically only in the Persian Empire. Since the Persian church was highly centralized, the form of the Edessene rite practiced in Iraq soon prevailed for the church of the East everywhere.[10]

William Macomber describes the Chaldean rite as a product of a fusion of Judeo-Christianity with the Assyro-Babylonian and Iranian cultures. Its liturgical language and its thought categories and imagery were closely akin to those of the Jews of Mesopotamia. Its principal anaphora (Eucharistic prayer) bore the name of the apostles Addai and Mari.[11]

Jacob Baradai's followers, who came to be known as the Syrian Orthodox Church, greatly influenced the liturgical tra-

10. William Macomber, "A Theory on the Origins of the Syrian, Maronite, and Chaldean Rites," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 39 (1973): 238–39.

11. Macomber, "A History of the Chaldean Mass," *Worship* 51 (1977): 107–10.

dition of Antioch. Among those who rejected Chalcedon were entire provinces of east and west Syria, especially those provinces that spoke Syriac and had not adopted Hellenistic culture. There was turmoil in the region for more than a century.[12] As a result, while there was a tendency to bring uniformity to the rite of Antioch, this desire did not succeed for many centuries. William Macomber speculates that this might explain why some characteristically Maronite features are found in some old liturgical manuscripts of Jacobite origin.[13]

Among the pro-Chalcedonians who were able to preserve their identity in the region of Second Syria were the monks of the monastery of St. Maron near the shores of the Orontes River and the people who gravitated around them or lived on their lands. These were Syriac-speaking Chalcedonians who eventually succeeded in organizing an independent hierarchy. Liturgically, according to Macomber, they were able to preserve and develop the ancient Syriac rite of Edessa. In the Maronite tradition this common anaphora is known as the *Third Anaphora of St. Peter,* or *Sharar.* For Macomber elements of this common Edessene rite also appear in other prayers of the Mass, parts of the baptismal rite, and in the hymns of the divine office.[14]

Regarding the liturgical texture of the Syriac region, Macomber concludes that the Syrian rite is basically that of Antioch, but with the anaphoral structure borrowed from the rite of Jerusalem and the metrical hymns either borrowed from or inspired by that of Edessa. The Maronite and Chaldean rites, on the other hand, are in origin independent developments of the ancient Edessene rite. The Maronite rite has subsequently borrowed much from the Syrian rite.[15]

12. Khouri-Sarkis, "Introduction," 16–17.

13. Macomber, "Theory on the Origins," 239–40.

14. Ibid., 241; Macomber, "History," 110–11; see also Irénée-Henri Dalmais, "L'héritage antiochien de l'église maronite," *Melto* 3 (1967): 64.

15. Macomber, "Theory on the Origins," 242.

On the sociopolitical level the Maronites, although surrounded by a Syrian Orthodox majority, affirmed the faith of Chalcedon, propagated it, and defended it with force. Favored and supported by the army of the empire, the Maronites extended their field of action as far as Mesopotamia, Osrhoene, and the Euphratean province. With the Arab invasions their fortunes changed, and so they left Second Syria in large numbers and sought refuge in the mountains of North Lebanon.[16]

16. Khouri-Sarkis, "Introduction," 23–25.

I

THE HIDDENNESS OF GOD

The history of religious experience in all religious traditions, including the Catholic tradition, has been an attempt to affirm the obvious elusiveness of the holy that is God and yet the conviction that the divine is within creation and human existence itself. In traditions that believe that God has indeed manifested himself in revelation and exercises an abiding presence in grace, there is sometimes an inclination to act as if this radical distinctness of God from humanity has been overcome. While manifesting the divine, creation and revelation in no way diminish its mystery. Therefore, an affirmation of the essential mysteriousness of God is also necessary. Such a conviction was a characteristic of the Judaic tradition and was preserved in Judeo-Christianity.

Noting the radiance of Moses' face when he had conversed with the Lord, St. Ephrem observes:

When Moses realized that children of the flesh like himself were unable to look at the borrowed glory on his face, he was overwhelmed that he had dared look at the glory of that essence in whose flood heavenly and earthly creatures submerge and emerge, neither fath-

oming its depths, nor reaching its shores, nor finding its boundary or limit.[1]

It would seem that Ephrem is always conscious of the overwhelming reality that is God and therefore is reluctant to say too much. When referring to God directly in his polemical writings and elsewhere, Ephrem protects God's mystery by using variations of the Syriac term for "being," which corresponds to the Hebrew term "YHWH." In these cases it is translated into English with terms such as "divinity," "godhead," and "self-existent."[2] Ephrem uses the term "Father" when speaking of the divine relationship with the Word or with the Holy Spirit or regarding stages in the plan of salvation.

The Syriac fathers have no doubt that humans can possess the life of God in faith and grace. Yet they are also aware, at the same time, of the abiding mysteriousness and inaccessibility of God. Such is the real paradox at the heart of Syriac belief. Their Jewish-Christian origins and their familiarity with scripture engendered a feeling of religious awe. Their worldview presumed an infinite distance between creator and creature, and the ability of the human mind was seen therefore as limited. The long, drawn-out theological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries raised second thoughts as to the value of too much "scrutiny" and the feeling that such arguments are eventually counterproductive.

For St. Ephrem (d. 373), the realm of the divine is radically inaccessible to reason. While the fact of God's existence is knowable, the nature of the divine remains impenetrable. The mysteriousness of God is beyond the grasp also of the angels. According to Robert Murray, Ephrem's *Hymns on the Faith*

1. Ephrem, *Homily on our Lord XXIX,* in *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works,* trans. Edward G. Mathews Jr. and Joseph P. Amar (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 305.

2. See Mathews and Amar, eds., *St. Ephrem the Syrian,* 49, 274 ff., esp. footnote 5.

were his attempts to develop a dialectical theology of God, hidden and revealed, in response to the rationalistic debates of Arianism. For Ephrem human words are limited, and there is an infinite gulf between creature and creator.[3] Ephrem writes:

> A thousand thousands stood; ten thousands ten thousands ran.
> Thousands and ten thousands were not able to investigate the One.
> All of them in silence, therefore, stood to serve Him.
> He has no consort except the Child that is from Him.
> Seeking Him is in silence. When Watchers [angels] went to investigate
> they reached silence and are restrained.[4]

In his *Hymn on the Faith, No. 4*, Ephrem reasons:

> You are too utterly a Wonder, on every side, for us ever to probe into You. . . . It is impossible for an investigation's reach to come as far as You. When it reaches out to arrive, it is cut off and falls back; it is too short for your distance.[5]

Ephrem explains that only the Son can comprehend the Father because they are of the same nature (*Hymn on the Faith, No. 11,* 7–11). But this relationship of connaturality, which is necessary to open our reason to the divine mystery, is absolutely excluded to all creatures by the radical transcendence of God.

Not having been influenced by the Greek philosophical view of the dichotomy of the soul and body, Ephrem considers all creatures as composed of basic elements such as earth, air, fire, and water. He therefore reasons that corporeal, psychic, and angelic senses are too gross to perceive the divine. The spirituality of the human soul or of an angel are the most subtle

3. Murray, "The Paradox of God's Hiddenness and Accessibility in St. Ephrem," *New Blackfriars* 996, no. 85 (2004): 158–62, at 159.

4. Ephrem, *Hymn on the Nativity, No. 21,* in *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns,* trans, with an introduction by Kathleen McVey (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 177–78.

5. Cited in Griffith, "Faith," 52.

forms possible being made up of the two most pure elements, air and fire (*Hymn on the Faith, No. 55,* 5). However, since all spiritual creation remains to a certain measure material, the spirituality of the divine nature is absolute and transcends radically that of the creature. This is why the divine nature always remains impenetrable to the spirit and sense of both angels and men. Ephrem concludes that we cannot understand the mysteries of nature, of our birth and death, of our own soul, and so it should not surprise us that we cannot reach the heavens.[6] If we cannot achieve knowledge of ourselves, how should we dare to investigate the origin and nature of God who knows all things?[7]

Ephrem describes, in his *Nisibene Hymn, No. 3,* the difficulties of the human mind in searching out God and the crucial role played by the Word in the incarnation:

> Fix thou our hearing, that it be not loosed and wander!
> For it is a-wandering if one enquire, who He is and what He is like.
> For how can we avail, to paint in us the likeness, of that Being
> which is like to the mind?
> Naught is there in it that is limited, in all of it He sees and hears;
> all of it as it were speaks; all of it is in all senses.
> Response: Praise to the One Being, that is to us unsearchable!
> His aspect cannot be discerned,
> that it should be portrayed by our understanding . . .
> in His graciousness He put on the fashion of humankind
> and gathered us into His likeness.
> . . . . These things were for our profit;
> that Being in our likeness was made like to us,

6. André de Halleux, "Mar Ephrem théologien," *Parole de l'Orient* 4 (1973): 43–44. Jacob of Serugh also views humans as consisting of the four elements: "The Creator combined fire and air to water and earth and made of it an image to reveal to the world his wisdom," cited in Khalil Alwan, "L'homme 'microcosme,'" in *Anthropologie de Jacques de Saroug,* excerpts ex dissertatione ad Doctoratum (Junieh, Lebanon: Imprimerie Modern "Kreim," 1988), 28.

7. Ephrem, *Hymn on the Faith, No. 1,* cited in *The Harp of the Spirit,* trans. Brock (London: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1983), 7.

that we may be made like Him. One there is that is like Him,
the Son Who proceeded from Him, Who is stamped with His
likeness.[8]

In another passage Ephrem uses the image of the sun and its light. He explains that the eye is too weak to look at the brightness of the sun, and in the same way the divine glory is too strong for his creature. Therefore, it is by the "Son of the Invisible" that we can see the "Invisible." Through his only-begotten Son the invisible essence of the Father is rendered visible.[9]

A favorite image for Ephrem is the pearl that he uses as a symbol of various themes of faith. He also sees it as a parable regarding the immensity of God. In his *Hymn on the Faith, No. 1,* he describes the pearl as speaking and referring to itself as the "daughter of the illimitable sea"; because of this it bears a wealth of mysteries. While one might search out the sea, one cannot search out the Lord of the sea. Just as divers are able to sustain themselves only for a few moments in the sea, "who would linger and be searching on into the depths of the Godhead?"[10] In various places Ephrem refers to the Father and Son as two inaccessible seas and to divinity as a powerful sea that the human spirit is unable to investigate. The theme of the sea, therefore, is an appropriate symbol in expressing negative theology.[11]

Ephrem takes a middle position regarding the faculty of

8. Ephrem, *Nisibene Hymn, No. 3,* in *The Nisibene Hymns,* trans. J. T. Sarsfield Stopford, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church,* vol. 13, *Gregory the Great, Ephraim Syrus, Aphraat,* edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, Mich: Erdmens, 1964), 13:170–71.

9. Ephrem, *Hymn on the Faith, No. 6,* cited in Georges Saber, *La théologie baptismale de Saint Ephrem* (Kaslik, Lebanon: Université de Saint Esprit, 1974), 28.

10. Ephrem, *Hymn on the Faith, No. 1,* in *The Pearl: Seven Hymns on the Faith,* trans. J. B. Morris, in Schaff and Wace, *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* 13:293.

11. Pierre Yousif, "Symbolisme christologique dans la Bible et dans la nature chez S. Ephrem de Nisibe," *Parole de l'Orient* 8 (1977–78): 24.

knowing. He declares that it is not proper to cultivate either ignorance or deep investigation. "For there is One who is perfect in every respect whose knowledge penetrates through all." He cautions that not everything that is clever is true. "[W]hatever is debated is not deep, but whatever is said by God is subtle when it is believed."[12]

In his writings Ephrem is harsh against those, such as the Arians and others who engaged in endless controversies, whom he calls the "scrutinizers." It is not only the heresy itself that is at issue, but the presumption that humans could investigate into the nature of God. Ephrem says in *Hymn on the Faith, No. 10:*

> The thong of Your sandal was something fearful to the discerning;
> the hem of your cloak is awesome to those who understand,
> yet our foolish generation through its prying into You,
> has gone quite mad, drunk with new wine.[13]

In fact, Robert Murray reasons that Ephrem's answer to intellectual investigation is to resort to a symbolical and analogical approach to theology,[14] a thesis that will be developed in a later chapter.

Jacob of Serugh (d. 521), a renowned Syriac writer and author of hundreds of verse homilies (*memrés*) and other writings, follows the same tradition as Ephrem. In a second letter on the faith, he declares:

> You who would plan to scrutinize Christ's plan of salvation, end your search, and do not allow yourself to go astray in seeking the one who cannot be found.

12. Taeke Jansma, "Ephrem on Exodus II:5: Reflections on the Interplay of Free Will and Divine Providence," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 39 (1973): 17.

13. Ephrem, *Ephrem the Syrian: Select Poems,* trans., introduction and notes Brock and George A. Kiraz (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2006), 211.

14. Murray, "A Hymn of St. Ephrem to Christ on the Incarnation, the Holy Spirit, and the Sacraments," *Eastern Churches Review* 3 (1970–71): 144, 149.

Do not be eager to reach out to what is ungraspable, for the way of Christ is beyond nature. Besides, you, yourself, are imprisoned and limited by nature, and are unable by word to circumscribe the way which is beyond limit.[15]

Ephrem's whole approach to the knowability of God can be expressed in the following passage:

Though your nature is one, its expressions are many;
they find three levels, high, middle, and lowly.
Make me worthy of the lowly part,
of picking up crumbs from the table of your wisdom.
Your highest expression is hidden with your Father,
your middle riches are the wonder of the Watchers.
A tiny stream from your teaching, Lord,
for us below makes a flood of interpretations.[16]

Jacob of Serugh uses the imagery of fire to stress the absolute unapproachability of God. In his *Homily No. 94,* he describes a "fearful fire" flowing from God. Therefore, God is far from worshipers and believers and fearful to those who would wish to seek after Him. The fire holds back those who would approach God for the purpose of investigation.[17]

Also, following Ephrem, Jacob points out that the heavenly realities are revealed on the altar of the Eucharist and that one need not desire too far, but can experience heavenly powers in the service of the holy altar. In his *Homily No. 125,* he declares:

And he made the Secret descend; he arranged by it
that his account should come to the world.
And in the midst of the world,
he established the altar for bodily creatures,

15. Joseph Obeid, "Deuxième épitre de Jacques de Saroug sur la foi," *Parole de l'Orient* 12 (1984–85): 191.

16. Murray, "Hymn of St. Ephrem," 143.

17. Roberta Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabboug, and Jacob of Sarug* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 138.

And he became a body from whom they should eat,
their dwelling place.[18]

According to Roberta Chesnut, Jacob does not deal with the issue of contemplation, nor does he use the word *theoria* to describe a mystical ascent of the mind to God.

According to Jacob, reason belongs to the realm of the visible. To use it to try to understand the presence of God in Christ is to engage in controversy. To try to use Greek philosophy in theology is the work of Satan, who uses it to disturb the praise that humanity owes to God. Christ "came to enlighten the world, not to be investigated by the world; he came to save the captives, not to be tracked down by the saved; he came to make the unclean clean, not that their mouths make propositions about him."

The only approach to God is through faith and love, and is granted only to the simple. Jacob writes:

To love he is near and revealed, and he stands like the day;
But from the controversy of knowers he is really far away . . .
Oh wise man, (you cannot interpret him) . . .
Oh proud scribe, know yourself and see yourself.
And not in pride will you speak the account of Immanuel.
In the simplicity of faith, in perfection, in humility
speak the account when it is spoken.[19]

In his *Mimro* on the faith, Jacob declares:

I erred in trying to search you, for I have not found you in the limits [of human nature], so, I took refuge in faith where I found you. I had search for you with the "wise" and I fell into a snare; so I returned to the "simple," in order to walk without ambushes. I learned to believe thanks to sinners, for the wisdom of the world is not necessary when one believes.[20]

18. Jacob of Serugh, *Homily, No. 125,* in ibid., 139.
19. Jacob of Serugh, *Homily, No. 40,* in ibid., 140–41.
20. Obeid, "Deuxième épitre," 189–90.



The Maronite liturgy reflects both in the Service of the Holy Mysteries and in the Divine Office the idea of the hiddenness of God. For example, the "prayer of forgiveness" or *hoosoyo* for the morning office of the Sunday of the Birth of John the Baptizer declares: "O God, naturally hidden and inaccessible to the human spirit, you willed to form our world after that of the angels and spirits and created two worlds from nothing." The second prayer of peace in the *Anaphora of John Chrysostom* declares: "O Lord on high, hidden from all creation, you are peace to the angry, forgiveness to sinners, and comfort to those who grieve." The "Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving" of the *Anaphora of St. John Maron* refers to the Father as "unsearchable God." In the anaphora for the consecration of baptismal water, the celebrant prays: "When he [Christ] left the dwelling place of your hiddenness, he descended and abided in the virginal womb." The "prayer of forgiveness" for Epiphany begins: "May we be worthy to offer glory, praise, and honor to the hidden Father, who thundered from the heavens and acknowledged his beloved One." The "prayer of forgiveness" for Pentecost begins with the salutation: "May we be worthy to praise, glorify, and honor the hidden Father."[21] The *qolo* (choir or congregational chant) for Pentecost Sunday chants: "God the Father, hidden from us, we give you praise." A *qolo* for the first Sunday of Pentecost:

21. Citations from the Maronite liturgy, unless indicated otherwise, are taken from *Lectionary: Syriac-Maronite Church; The Seasons* (Detroit: Diocese of St. Maron U.S.A., 1976); *Qurbono: The Book of Offering* (Brooklyn: St. Maron, 1994); *Anaphora Book of the Syriac-Maronite Church of Antioch* (Youngstown: Diocese of St. Maron, 1978); *Fenqitho: A Treasury of Feasts According to the Syriac-Maronite Church of Antioch* (Diocese of St. Maron U.S.A., 1980); *The Prayer of the Faithful According to the Liturgical Year* [*Prière du croyant selon l'année liturgique maronite*], ed. Boutros Gemayel, 3 vols. (Brooklyn: Diocese of St. Maron, 1985); *Mysteries of Initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, Communion: According to the Maronite Antiochene Church* (Brooklyn: Diocese of St. Maron U.S.A., 1987); *The Mystery of Crowning: According to the Maronite Antiochene Church* (Brooklyn: Diocese of St. Maron U.S.A., 1991); and *Book of Offering: According to the Rite of the Antiochene Syriac Maronite Church* (Brooklyn: Eparchy of St. Maron of Brooklyn, 2012.

> Trinity Sunday declares: "Glory to you, O hidden and inscrutable Father."
>
> An example from the Divine Office is the "prayer of forgiveness" for the fourth *qawmo* of *Lilyo* (the night office), which states in its salutation: "to the One who, from the beginning is the unique and true God, and who eternally transcends all faculty, intelligence and human thought, for he is inexplicable, incomprehensible, and ungraspable; who alone knows himself."[22]

While the chapter on revelation will deal with God's revealing of himself through his Word, one of the more basic images associated with God is the theme of light. It may be rooted in the primordial light described in Genesis, or the universal symbol of light representing goodness, while darkness symbolizes chaos and evil. In commenting on Exodus 33:20, "No man sees me and lives," Ephrem observes, "And so, the Self-Existent One is deadly to those who see Him, not because of His severe wrath, but because of His intense brightness."[23]

Christ is described in terms of light especially in his baptism at the Jordan; his cross is seen exalted as a cross of light and a lighthouse. The light that is Christ shatters the darkness of *sheol,* and the shining face of the Father and/or Christ is the hope of the deceased. This theme of light coincides perhaps with the vision of God as light in various mystical traditions. Ephrem in his *Hymn of the Church, No. 36* says, "Give thanks to the Creator of the light wherein is depicted the heavenly Light; give praise to the Maker of the light that is a symbol of the Light of our Savior!" In the same hymn he applies this theme to Christ in this way: "Just as Moses gleamed with the divine glory because he saw the splendor briefly how much more should the

22. Cited by Jean Tabet, *L'office commun maronite: Étude du Lilyo et du Safro* (Kaslik, Lebanon: Université de Saint-Esprit, 1972), 145.

23. Mathews and Amar, eds., *St. Ephrem the Syrian,* 304.

body wherein Christ resided gleam, and the river where he was baptized?"[24]



The Syriac liturgies celebrate the theme of light often. At the epiklesis (the prayer invoking the Holy Spirit) in the *Anaphora of Saint John Maron* the celebrant petitions: "Hear us, O Lord, that the gates heaven may be opened, revealing that place of glorious light." A qolo for Mondays in Pentecost declares: "Your brightness awes the ranks of fire who serve you, Lord, unceasingly." The "prayer of forgiveness" in the evening office for Friday chants: "Praise, glory and honor to the Light, whose radiance has revealed the Father of Lights; to the Brightness whose splendor has drawn us to the threshold of light." The prayer for light in the divine office of Saturday morning states:

O Lord God, be a perpetual morning for us, a light
which does not fade and a day that does not end.
Then we shall be illumined by the light of your
holy commandments in our feelings, thoughts, and
desires. Our Lord and our God, glory to you forever.

The eschatological theme of the light that will not end is seen in the prayer of conclusion of the common for evening prayer:

By your will, Lord, you have made the day to cease
and the night to come, and it is by your order that night reigns;
be for us that great day that does not pass away!
At twilight, make your light to shine in our hearts
and in the darkness of night enlighten us
by the knowledge of your truth.

24. Brock, "St. Ephrem on Christ as Light in Mary and in the Jordan: Hymni de Ecclesia 36," *Eastern Churches Review* 7 (1975): 138–39.1.

The theme of light is specifically applied to the God-man. The *sedro* (i.e., the body of the prayer of forgiveness) in the morning office of Christmas contains the following ideas: "Son of our God, Word and Image of the Father … your light is more resplendent than light, your sun more brilliant than the sun, and your day more magnificent than the day."

The salvific effect of the Light and the image of the "face of Christ" as light can be seen in the opening prayer of the Service of the Holy Mysteries for the first three weeks of Lent: "O Lord God, enlighten our hearts and consciences with the radiance of Your face that we may walk in the rays of Your light during this season of Lent." The third prayer of peace in the *Anaphora of St. Peter* declares, "O Lord, may the light of your face shine upon us." The "prayer of forgiveness" of the first Sunday of Great Lent petitions, "Give us the joy of your eternal feast and let us rejoice in the splendor of your face." The third prayer of the morning office for Thursdays in the season of Resurrection prays, "And when the sun of our life sets, it is your unsetting sun which will shine for us. We shall behold your face in joy, rejoice in the light of your glory, and praise you, forever. Amen." And, the opening prayer of the evening office for Fridays in the season of Resurrection declares, "O Lord God, make us worthy of the feast without setting or darkness where our eyes will open to the light of your glory and where our gaze will perceive the splendor of your face."

2

CREATION AND SIN

The Syriac view of creation is more a product of biblical influence and faith experience than philosophical speculation. One of its main contributions is the teaching that creation, revelation, and incarnation are viewed as elements of one divine process. Therefore, creation cannot be separated from God's self-revelation or from the event of the Word becoming creature. The next chapter will discuss the view of the Syriac writers that creation is in its very nature revelatory through types and symbols. The present chapter deals with the creation of the world and humanity. In this regard it will be noted that the Syriac writers claimed that the biblical declaration that humans are created in the image and likeness of God refers to their being the reflection of the preexistent Christ. Another significant insight is that humanity itself is understood as the converging point of creation.

THE PREEXISTENCE OF CHRIST

St. Ephrem, in his *Commentary on Genesis,* interprets the verse "Let us create man in our image" (Gn 1:26), as a mysterious

revelation of God's First-Born and the image of God in his creating and redeeming activity. For Ephrem every command regarding creation in the beginning was directed to the Word who is God's "Voice." In the *Hymn on the Faith, No. 6,* Ephrem states:

> In the beginning, however, the works have been created
> through the First-Born.
> For (It is written:) God said: "Let there be light — and it was created."
> Whom, now did he command, when there was nothing?
> the six days that were created give testimony . . .
> that (the Creator) did not give commands to the (created)
> works that they should make themselves.
> Nay, through the One from the One were they created.
> The Father commanded through his Voice,
> the Son carried out the work.

Ephrem then concludes, "In the creation of man, finally, the Omniscient took heed . . .to reveal his First-Born abundantly."[1]

For Ephrem the key phrase in Genesis, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," is making a fundamental affirmation that the Word of God is in the image of God and that God's relationship with humans is realized by the mediation of the Word. While Christ as the Word is the image of the Father, he is also the perfect figure of man. Humanity finds its perfect realization in Christ.[2]

Jacob of Serugh also affirms that humanity in the person of the "great Adam" had originally been created by God the Father in the image of his Son as he was to appear on earth — that is, in the image of Jesus. In *Homily 125,* he declares, "Before the created things, the Father sealed the image of his Son, and formed him and showed him how he would shine among earth-

1. Cited in Kronholm, *Motifs,* 40–41.

2. Nabil El-khoury, "Gen. 1:26 — Dans l'interprétation de Saint Ephrem, ou la relation de l'homme á Dieu," *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 205 (1978): 199–200.

ly beings. The Father looked at the image of his Son and formed Adam."[3] On another occasion, Jacob of Serugh observes:

> In regard to Adam, the Father addressed himself to the Son
> who was with God and who is God
> so that Adam be the image of the Father and the likeness of the Son
> and by him the mystery of the divinity be revealed.
> Christ, who would come at the end of time, had given his likeness to him
> by which Adam became the image of the Father...
> He spoke and created by his word an image of his Father,
> a likeness of the Son in corporeal form.[4]

Jacob of Serugh concludes that humanity was created originally as a kind of double image—as an image of the Son, who is the image of the Father, but also as an image of the Son made man. The humanity of Christ, then, is in a primordial relationship to the human race. Adam is in a very special sense the image of God. In *Homily 94* he explains:

> The image of the Son, the only one, he gave to Adam, while he was its creator,
> he took it from him when he visited him....
> While he was its creator, he was related to him who gave him the image....
> To his own he came; in his image he dwelt in the daughter of Adam,
> who was formed in his image and because of this he was related to him.[5]

Jacob also observes:

3. Cited by Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies,* 113–14; see also Elie Khalifé-Hachem, "Homélie metrique de Jacques de Saroug sur l'amour," *Parole de l'Orient* 1 (1970): 286.

4. Cited in Sony, "L'anthropologie," 153–86, at 174; see also Johns Abraham Konat, "Christological Insights in Jacob of Serugh's Typology as Reflected in his *Memre,*" *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 77 (2001): 46–72.

5. Cited by Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies,* 127.

Man from the beginning was in the image of God
and it was in a woman that God dwelt to save his image.
In preparing the side of Adam that it would become Eve
He prepared for himself a place to dwell at the end of time.
This is why he gave his image to the race of Adam
so that it would not be scorned while he dwelt, at the end, in his image
He gave Adam the image of his Only Son in creating him
and he borrowed it in saving it.[6]



The Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving of the *Anaphora of St. John Maron* declares: "You are the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, your beloved Son, born of you and equal to you. He is the radiance of your glory, the image of your being, and by your power the maker of all. In him you created the world in your grace. In him we see you, and from him we receive your Spirit. In him the mystery of the Trinity, hidden from all ages, was revealed."

Regarding salvation-history, Ephrem speculates that the divine love that created humans through Christ out of love would foresee the rejection by man and his wandering astray, and also his restoration. In the *Nisibene Hymn, No. 69,* he states:

You have formed the dust from the beginning, in mercy,
and you are to bring your gift towards it to completion, in love.
You, O Good One, have created man.
Although it was obvious to you, that he would reject you and go astray,
you formed him in order to justify him (when he had fallen).[7]

Jacob of Serugh comments on God's foresight:

God has no new thought since eternity,
for nothing is in the intention of God which was not from the beginning . . . .

6. Cited by Sony, "L'anthropologie," 174–75.
7. Kronholm, *Motifs,* 50.

The economy of the whole way of the Son of God,
His Father traced it from the beginning in the house of Adam.[8]



The Maronite liturgy reflects the role of the Word in creation. The Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving of the *Anaphora of Jacob of Serugh* declares:

"King of the Ages, and Inscrutable Hiddenness, Your beloved Son is being from your being, the appearance of your light, and the reflection of your glory. He is the power of your Word, through whom You created the world." A similar thought is expressed in the Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving of the *Anaphora of John Maron:* "Father, unsearchable Lord of all generations, You sent the Lord Jesus, who is equal to You. As your Word, He is the brightness of your fire, and the image of your all-powerful being. Through Him You created the generations in your grace."

RAMIFICATIONS OF BEING IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD

Humans are the highest work of creation, since they are made in the image of God's First-Born. Reflecting Genesis, Ephrem understands the soul of Adam as having been engendered by God's own breath. He believes that humans would be distinguished by possessing the singular faculties of speech and freedom. In his *Hymn on Paradise, No. 8,* Ephrem teaches that God created the human body so that it would sing praise to its maker. However, it possessed no sound as a silent harp until he breathed a soul into it. With the ability to utter sound, the soul acquired the gift of sharing wisdom.[9]

Ephrem emphasizes the centrality of giving praise in his

8. Jacob of Serugh, *Homily No. 3,* cited in Konat, "Christological," 59.

9. Ephrem, *Hymn on Paradise, No. 8,* in *Saint Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise,* trans., introduction by Sebastian Brock (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 134.

Hymn on the Faith, No. 14, where he invites Christ to attend the wedding feast of the church's Eucharist and enable worshippers to give praise:

> I have invited You, Lord, to a wedding feast of song,
> but the wine — the utterance of praise at our feast has failed.
> You are the guest who filled the jars with good wine,
> fill my mouth with Your praise.[10]

Equally important for Ephrem is free will as that characteristic by which Adam was the image of God.[11] Commenting on Genesis, Ephrem presents God as saying, "Let us make man in our image; that is to say that he has the power to listen to us, if he will listen to us."[12] Ephrem stresses the significance of human freedom in the *Hymn on the Epiphany, No. 10:*

> The compulsion of God is all-powerful;
> It is not compulsion, however, for which he has a predilection
> but a [free] will endowed with discernment;
> Therefore in good works He invites us
> to live a life without compulsion, by persuasion.
> In his goodness, he works to reconcile the two;
> He does not will to do violence to our freedom;
> nor does he consent that it be left to itself;
> Had he constrained it, He would have removed its free will;
> and had He abandoned it, He would have deprived it of help.
> He knows compulsion would frustrate us;
> He knows that indulgence would lead to our destruction;
> If He teaches us, He gains us;
> He has neither constrained nor abandoned us, as the Evil One:
> He has taught, chastened, and won us, in His goodness.[13]

10. Brock, *Harp,* 18.
11. See Jansma, "Ephraem on Exodus II:5," 18.
12. El-khoury, "Gen 1:26 — Dans l'interprétation," 199.
13. See François Cassingena, *Hymnes sur L'épiphanie: Hymnes baptismales de l'Orient syrien,* Spiritualité orientale 70 (Bégrolles-en-Mauge: Abbaye de Bellfontaine, 1997), 93–97.

In the *Hymn of Faith, No. 25,* Ephrem summarizes his position poetically: "Because you are a harp endowed of life and language, says he, your chords and words possess liberty. O harp, who of itself and according to its own will chants of its God."[14]

When commenting on Genesis 1:26, where God grants Adam dominion over earthly creatures, Ephrem sees a revelation of how Adam is in the image and likeness of God:

> According to what has been the rule up until now, namely, if it pleases God He will make it known to us, Moses explains in what way we are in the image and likeness of God, when he said "Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds, and over the cattle, and over all the earth." It is the dominion that Adam received over the earth and over all that is in it that constitutes the likeness of God who has dominion over the heavenly things and the earthly things.[15]

Jacob of Serugh understands the image of God in humans to consist of four characteristics. First, humans are called to be collaborators in creation. In Genesis Adam is given the role of naming the animals. Human marriage is a "type" of the future marriage of Christ with his church. Second, humans have a spiritual dimension in the exercise of their higher faculties. Third, they have the ability of speech, and fourth, they possess free will.[16]



> In the Maronite Office, a *qolo* for the morning office for the Saturdays during Lent chants: "It is for his glory that the Lord gave you your tongue and intelligence."

Aphrahat develops his own theological anthropology based on an understanding that human beings are composed of body, soul, and spirit and reflecting the biblical teaching that God

14. El-Khoury, "Gen 1:26 — Dans l'interprétation," 203.
15. Mathews and Amar, eds., *St. Ephrem the Syrian,* 94.
16. Bou Mansour, *Théologie* 1:76–87, 134.

breathed his spirit into humans. There are times when Aphrahat seems to be saying that it is God's very spirit that humans possess and thus have life. It is God, the living One, who gives life through his spirit. Aphrahat speculates that it is the spirit of God that becomes the prophetic spirit that speaks to Ezechial; that lived in Saul after his royal anointing, but was later lost; and that also inhabited David but not in continuous fashion. During the course of the history of Israel this spirit has been found to be a spirit of knowledge and wisdom.

Christ received the Spirit in fullness at his baptism and thereby freely received his messianic consecration. By baptism we put on the spirit of Christ. Before baptism humans have only "animal spirit," which they receive by creation, but in the second birth, they receive the holy spirit of God.

Humans are created with a living soul (that is, the life principle) and are destined to become "living spirit." Thanks to the intervention of the spirit, the good become spiritual, incorruptible, and immortal, while the evil are not transformed but remain in the dust in which Adam was created, in the "animal condition."[17]

Francis Crawford Burkitt summarizes this doctrine of Aphrahat as follows: "Such is the creed of Aphraates. To him Christianity was the revelation of a Divine Spirit dwelling in man and fighting against moral evil, not first and foremost a tissue of philosophical speculation about the nature of Divinity itself."[18]

The fact that humans are created in the image and likeness of God has moral consequences. Ephrem, in his *Homily on Admonition and Repentance,* reasons:

17. Riccardo Terzoli, "Âme et esprit chez Aphraate," *Parole de l'Orient* 3 (1972): 108–13.

18. Francis Crawford Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity* (London: 1904), 85.

If you should insult the King's image, you shall pay the
penalty of murder;
and if you revile a man, you revile the image of God.
. . . . You have a spiritual nature; the soul is the image of the Creator;
honor the image of God, by being in agreement with all men.[19]

HUMANS AS THE CONVERGING POINT OF CREATION

Syriac anthropology arrives at the conclusion that humans are not only the summit of creation, but also the bond uniting the heavens and the earth. The body of Adam was formed of dust from the earth in its virginal state to become a true microcosm. In fact, Ephrem sees in the manner of Adam's creation and in the purpose of his creation a type of the conception of Christ, the New Adam and reconciler of the world, born in the virginal womb of Mary.[20] Being in the image of God who has power over all things high and low, Adam also has power over all creation.[21]

For Jacob of Serugh man is a microcosm possessing in himself all the elements. Man's eyes image the two eyes of the world, the sun and the moon. In his countenance one sees the firmament. God made man the center of the universe and the place where all of the beauties of nature converge. All of creation was created for him as nourishment; the universe ought to prostrate before the statue or the "image" of the creator. However, Jacob's purpose was to draw a pastoral lesson and an exhortation to repentance in developing this theme.[22]

19. Ephrem, *Homily on Admonition and Repentance,* in *Three Homilies,* trans. A. Edward Johnston, in Schaff and Wace, *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* 13:330–31; see also Khalifé-Hachem, "*Homélie metrique,*" 289.

20. Kronholm, *Motifs,* 45.

21. El-khoury, "Gen 1:26 — Dans l'interprétation," 199.

22. Alwan, "L'homme 'microcosme,'" 17–18, 31, 34.

The Syriac mystic, Simon of Taibuteh, embodies this theological view with a spiritual admonition:

> Consider, O discerning man, that you are the image of God and the bond of all creation,
> both of the heavenly and of the terrestrial beings,
> and whenever you bend your head to worship and glorify God,
> all the creations, both heavenly and terrestrial, bow their heads with you and in you,
> to worship God; and whenever you do not worship and glorify Him,
> all the creatures grieve over you and turn against you, and you fall from grace.[23]

GRACE AS THE "ROBE OF GLORY"

In his theological anthropology Ephrem expresses the teaching on grace with the image of the "robe of glory." He understands Christ as vested in this robe from the beginning. He also uses this image regarding Adam. Jewish legend had it that Adam and Eve had been clothed in paradise but lost it at the Fall. Isaiah 61:3 refers to it as a mantle of praise.[24] Ephrem describes humans before the Fall as endowed with a particular "glory" that was subsequently lost, but restored through baptism.[25] In his *Commentary on the Gospel (Arm.) 19, 17,* Ephrem explains:

> For in the same way that he created by grace the first essence of creatures so that they were without stain, in the glory and magnificence that he had clothed himself, so by the mercy of God, there would be a new creation of all things, without stain, in the glory that he was clothed again.[26]

23. Simon of Taibuteh, "Mystical Works of Simon of Taibuteh," in *Early Christian Mystics,* edited and translated by Alphonse Mingana, Woodbrooke Studies 7, 8 (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1934).

24. See Brock, "Word and Sacrament in the Writings of the Syrian Fathers," *Sobornost* 6, no. 10 (1974): 689–70.

25. Kronholm, *Motifs,* 62.

26. El-khoury, "Gen 1:26 — Dans l'interprétation," 202.

Jacob of Serugh declares, "The robe of glory that was stolen away among the trees of Paradise have I put on in the waters of baptism."[27]

CONSCIENCE AND SIN

For Ephrem and his colleagues, human virtue consists in studying the law of God and internalizing it in one's heart and conscience. In his *Letter to Publius,* Ephrem demonstrates a rather sophisticated understanding of the interplay of law and conscience in guiding human freedom:

> My opinion is that this inner intelligence has been made the judge and the law, for it is the embodiment of the shadow of the law, and it is the shadow of the Lord of the law.... [It teaches] all yet using no force, giving counsel, but employing no compulsion reminding them of the judgment to come by means of warnings, bringing to their mind the kingdom of heaven so that they may desire it, explaining the rewards of the good so that they may yearn for them, showing to them the power of judgment, that they may restrain themselves, telling them of the gentleness of the Only-begotten, that they may take courage, running with them after every good thing and strengthening them, hovering over them and rebuking them as they stoop to what is hateful.... Here [on earth] it is mingled with them in every way, while there it stands up in front of them in this day [of judgment].[28]

Sin for the Syriac fathers is due to error and darkness, which results in a loss of freedom. It consists ultimately in a distortion of the image of God that human beings are, and in a loss of the harmony between the heavens and the earth. St. Ephrem, in his *Hymn on the Fast, No. 6,* prays that Christ will "open the eyes which our own free will has closed. Blessed is He who gave the mind's eye — which we have managed to blind."[29]

27. Brock, "Word and Sacrament," 689–70.
28. Brock, "Ephrem's Letter to Publius," *Le Museon* 89 (1976): 292–93.
29. Brock, *Harp,* 69.



The Maronite Divine Office speaks of the darkness of sin. In the opening prayer of Tuesday, it states: "May your light shine upon our thoughts, and keep the darkness of sin far from us." In the *sedro* (prayer of forgiveness) of the morning office of Tuesday it develops the same theme:

> Be blessed and honored, O Lord who has created light, dissipated
> and annihilated darkness; you have delivered us from the sleep of error and
> have granted us morning for our joy and to make us see the light of your
> creative power and the sublime grandeur of your wisdom.

The same theme is also repeated in the *sedro* of the evening office of Tuesday which declares:

"Accept our vigil, be favorable to our service, that your calm reign in us and your peace guide our hearts; so that darkness would not be in our spirit and it not be prey to the obscurity of sin." Developing the theme of sin as slavery, the first prayer of the morning office of the Monday of Holy Week prays: "Son of the Father, you have taken the condition of a slave and have become for us a curse to restore to us lost freedom."

Jacob of Serugh discusses the theological impact of original sin on our being the image of God and on the harmony of creation. For Jacob, Adam and Eve had been placed in paradise to be gardeners. However, in the first contest with the "Great Dragon" (Jacob's image for Satan), Adam was defeated, and a "wall of enmity" was established between God and the human race, "the upper beings and the lower beings." Cast out of Eden, Adam, "the Great Image," lay corrupting in *sheol,* separated from the "Hidden Father" by a seemingly insurmountable barrier.[30]

30. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies,* 113–14.

The vision of creation and the role of humans presented in this chapter can be summarized best in a hymn of thanksgiving composed by St. Ephrem in his *Commentary on the Diatesseron:*

We adore you, who have sent us into the world, who have given us rule over all that is there, and withdraws it in an hour that we do not know.... The earth praises you, who open her womb and give her fruits in season. The oceans praise you by the mouth of their waves, when their voices proclaim that you rule them. The trees praise you, when they are constrained by the breath of the wind to weep and give fruits. They bless you also, the plants so varied and the multicolored flowers.... May they be gathered and unite their voice in your praise, in gratitude for all your goods and united in peace to bless you; that all cooperate to build a work of praise.[31]

31. Cited in El-khoury, "Gen 1:26 — Dans l'interprétation," 204–5.

3

REVELATION

As noted, the Syriac mind was in awe of the radical inaccessiblity and mysteriousness of God. Only the word of God expresses God and would possibly manifest God. However, any attempt to understand the Word taking on created form would necessarily involve paradox and dialectic. Ephrem has been described as moving between apophatic and cataphatic poles. On the one hand, there is God's absolute transcendence and the incommunicability of his name to humans. On the other hand, human terms are inapplicable to him. Ephrem in his *Commentary on the Diatesseron* points out, "Among the ancients wisdom was recognized more in works than in words, and to the use of the tongue they preferred the power of the mind reflecting in silence."[1] In the Ephremic dialectic the moment of revelation follows normally that of lack of understanding.[2]

However, it was also Ephrem's conviction that creation itself is revelatory. In this context he speaks of nature, the Old Testament, and the New Testament as sources of revelation. According to André de Halleux, Ephrem considers revelation as a process engaging God himself in a sort of progressive incarnation.

1. Cited by Murray, "The Theory of Symbolism in St. Ephrem's Theology," *Parole de l'Orient* 6–7 (1975–76): 11, 16.

2. De Halleux, "Mar Ephrem théologien," *Parole de l'Orient* 4 (1973): 45.

In imprinting in nature and sacred scripture the signs that reveal him, it is as if God were preparing to put on the human nature of Jesus. God goes out from eternal simplicity to enter the multiplicity of history. It is in this sense that Ephrem speaks of the "changings" that God, by nature immutable, has appropriated by love. Immeasurable in himself, he has manifested himself in creation and in the incarnation, and finally in the miracles, all of which reveal to us only a faint ray of his glory. These "changings" of God do not concern his immutable nature but his divine will, demonstrating its power and its goodness.[3]

Ephrem understands creation as revelatory because it was created by the Word himself. He says, "Where you look, the symbol of Christ is present. And where you read, you find his types. For it is by him that all creatures have been made, and he has marked all his works by his symbols, since he created the world."[4] Ephrem sees the world as a symbolic whole. The world of terrestrial realities not only signifies, but precontains, in some ways, celestial realities. Images, words, and names in particular retain something of the essence of the beings that they signify. The universe is an immense Christological symbol, having for its end to reveal the Son of God and to prepare humanity for his coming. Ephrem declares:

> Creatures trace the symbols of Christ.
> Mary has formed the members of his body,
> but many wombs have given birth to the Unique Son;
> the womb of his mother gave birth to his humanity,
> but creatures have given birth to him symbolically.[5]

The elements of matter are for Ephrem visual means that express the work of God (*Hymn on Virginity, No. 11*). Ephrem,

3. Ibid., 45–46.

4. Ephrem, *Hymn on Viriginity, No. 20,* 2, in Murray, "Hymn of St. Ephrem," 147.

5. Ephrem, *Hymn on Virginity, No. 6,* 7–8, in Saber, "La typologie sacramentaire et baptismale de Saint Ephrem," *Parole de l'Orient* 4 (1973): 76–79.

enlightened by faith, sees in nature a symbol that speaks of God, of his works, and his mysteries, for God has left traces in the universe.[6]

Robert Murray summarizes this viewpoint by pointing out that Ephrem's poetical-theological method, beyond his use of types, symbols, and even sacramental "mysteries" is based on a grand conception of the harmony between God and all the orders of creation. God has filled creation with his traces and has given humans the mind and the faculty of language that can appreciate these pointers, express them, and follow them by the light of the gift of faith.[7]

Sebastian Brock believes that Ephrem is a representative of a Christian view that God and the "holy" are immanent in the world. Ephrem sees connections between everything in creation as possible pointers to Christ. All that is required is the eye of faith. To express these relationships Ephrem resorts to typology and other literary forms such as parallelism and paradox. Brock goes so far as to claim that types and symbols are not simply pointers; for Ephrem the symbol contains within itself the actual presence of that which it symbolizes. Thus, Ephrem has a sacramental view of the world.[8] In Ephrem's own words, "Because of the visible type you are able to see invisible realities with the eye."[9]

For Ephrem it is ultimately the incarnation and the mysteries (i.e., sacraments) that make it possible for humans to cope with the divine. The body of Christ serves as a necessary shield so that divinity can be revealed to us. In his *Homily on Nativity,* Ephrem explains:

6. Ephrem, *Hymn on the Unleavened Bread, No. 4,* 24; Ephrem, *Hymn on Virginity, No. 8,* 2, 20, 12, in Yousif, "Symbolisme christologique," 48.

7. Murray, "Theory of Symbolism," 2.

8. Ephrem, *Hymn on the Faith, No. 87,* 3, in Brock, "The Poet as Theologian," *Sobornost* 7, no. 4 (1977): 244–45; Brock, *Harp,* 6.

9. Cited by Saber, *Théologie baptismale,* 36.

The face of Moses shone when God spoke with him,
and he laid a veil over his face for the people were unable to behold him
—just as our Lord, from the womb, entered and put on the veil of the body;
He shone out and went forth, and the Magi beheld Him and brought gifts.[10]



This motif is reflected in the Maronite liturgy. For example, the "prayer of forgiveness" for Holy Thursday states: "O Lord Jesus Christ, God the Word, You are the Lord of heavenly and earthly creatures and the consuming Flame which the fiery ranks of heaven dare not look upon. In your compassion, you clothed yourself with a body. The heavenly creatures who serve You with reverence hide their faces before you."

However, Christ is not only a shield of the awesome essence of God, but also the most appropriate vehicle of revelation. Ephrem observes:

The eye is too weak to fix on the great brightness of the sun.
Without the Son of the Invisible, the eye would not know how to see the Invisible.
His glory is too strong for his creature.
By his unique Son, the Invisible Essence renders itself visible
and expresses itself by symbols.
By bread we eat the strength which is not consumable,
by wine we drink the fire that is not quenchable,
and by oil we are anointed by a power that cannot be diminished.
As he made himself tender for the mouth to take pleasure and eat,
he has softened his appearance for the eyes and his might in words,
that the ear might hear him.[11]

10. Brock, *Harp,* 64.

11. Ephrem, *Hymn on the Faith, No. 6,* 2–4, cited by Saber, "Typologie sacramentaire," 83; see also Murray, "Hymn of St. Ephrem," 147.



The *qolo* of the Maronite Sunday After the Birth of the Lord declares: "Glory be to the silent One, who spoke by his Word. His Word took a body, that we might apprehend his might; his Word took a body, that the bodies of our race may find life through his body."

However, according to Ephrem, God's revelation has a dialectical character. In his very revelation, God remains the hidden God. His images hide as much as they manifest. The more he appears close, the more he remains far. Expressing the presence of divine transcendence within creation presents a problem in the absence of philosophical categories. Ephrem's solution is found in his use of paradox—for example, to express power in weakness as seen in his writings on the Nativity and the Passion[12] and in his use of type and symbol.

Furthermore, Ephrem holds the view that revelation and even incarnation can be only partially successful in manifesting the mysteriousness of God. He declares:

If someone concentrate his attention solely on the metaphors used of God's majesty,
he abuses and misrepresents that majesty by means of those metaphors
with which God has clothed himself for man's own benefit,
and he is grateful to that Grace which bent down its stature to the level of
man's childishness: although God had nothing in common with it,
He clothed himself in the likeness of man in order to bring man to the likeness of himself.
Do not let your intellect be disturbed by mere names,
for Paradise has simply clothed itself in terms that are familiar to you:
it is not because it is poor that it has put on your imagery,
rather, your nature is far too weak to be able to attain to its greatness,

12. De Halleux, "Mar Ephrem théologien," 47.

and its beauties are much diminished by being depicted in the pale
colors
that you are familiar with.[13]

For Robert Murray, Ephrem teaches an "incarnation in language" parallel to the Word's personal incarnation. God humbles himself in submitting to descriptions in human words and images. In his *Hymn on the Faith, No. 5,* Ephrem declares:

Creature with Creator / cannot be compared
for their very names / are incommensurate,
and even more than the names / the essences are different.
Yet the Lord willed in his love / to give his names to his servants.[14]

TYPES, SYMBOLS, AND PARADOX

For Ephrem the principal way that God's manifestation in creation can be expressed is in type, symbol, and mystery. He uses the Syriac term *raza* to express these ideas. Pierre Yousif claims that Ephrem understands the term *raza* in four senses: first, enigma, as in the original Persian, where it referred to private and secret counsels held by court officials, which is reflected in the Aramaic of Daniel 6:4, where it means divine secrets.[15] The Hebrew term in Daniel was translated in the Septuagint by the Greek *mysterion* and used to describe a vision of the future given by God in symbols.[16] Second, it refers to mystery — that is, a reality that surpasses human intelligence (for example, in *On the Crucifixion, No. 8,* 5, regarding the being of Christ). In the New Testament the term "mystery" was used in the sense of Jesus'

13. Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise, No. 11,* 6–7, in Saint *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise,* trans. Brock, 156; see also Alain Desreumaux, "Une homélie syriaque anonyme sur la nativité," *Parole de l'Orient* 6–7 (1975–76): 195–203.

14. Murray, "Paradox," 160–61.

15. See Ephrem, *Hymn on the Unleavened Bread, No. 14,* 11, in Yousif, "Symbolisme christologique," 46.

16. Dalmais, "Raza and Sacrement," in *Rituels: Mélanges offerts á Pierre-Marie Gy,* edited by Paul De Clerck and Eric Palazzo (Paris: Cerf, 1990), 174.

teaching regarding the "secrets" of the kingdom" and St. Paul's teaching regarding the dispensation of God's plan throughout the course of history.[17] Third, it could be understood as a simple sign — that is, a means of knowledge and of indication, such as the symbols of nature that proclaim Christ;[18] and fourth, as symbol-mystery — that is, elements of the Old Testament become the reality of the New Testament and signify the divine realities of the church — for example, the sacraments.

Robert Murray explains that Ephrem's vision depended on the belief that all of the Old Testament pointed to Christ. *Raza* or mystery became the word for the "Christ-bearing" sense concealed in Old Testament figures conveying the idea of type and anti-type. Christ being the fulfillment is the "truth" or "reality." The Bible contains revelatory symbols of Christ because creation does. Murray observes that the reason so many trees or pieces of wood in the Old Testament can be seen as types of the cross is that the eye of faith sees every tree as pregnant with the mystery of the cross.[19] This last meaning will be discussed in a later chapter.

Ephrem states clearly that the method by which nature reveals Christ is by type and symbol. He explains in his *Hymn on Virginity, No. 5:*

> In the Garden of Eden and the terrestrial world our Lord's
> symbols multiply themselves.
> Who can gather in all the pictures of his mystery?
> In each one of them Christ is depicted in full.

17. This biblical treatment of mystery is taken from Raymond Brown, "Mystery (in the Bible)," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1967), 10:148–50, and Joseph Fitzmyer, "Pauline Theology," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary,* edited by Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Roland Murphy, 82:33 (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1990); see also Brown, *The Semitic Background of "Mystery" in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968).

18. See *Hymn on the Faith, No. 18,* in Yousif, "Symbolisme christologique," 46.

19. Murray, "Theory of Symbolism," 3 ff.

Things visible await you, Lord; types seek you out,
the symbols prefigure you, parables take their refuge in you.[20]

However, Ephrem continues to caution that even in symbol God remains hidden:

> However much, Lord, I would feel You, it is still not You
> yourself I touch,
> for my mind can touch nothing of Your hiddenness:
> it is just a visible, illumined, image that I see in the symbol of You;
> for all investigation into Your being is hidden.[21]

While the types emphasize the revelatory aspect of salvation, mystery focuses on the apophatic character of the divine and the elusive nature of the holy, present in the type and its fulfillment. Mystery is the accomplishment in Christ of a plan of God hidden at first, but subsequently manifested to humans. It is characterized by the two opposing aspects of "hidden, then manifest," or "enveloped in silence, then announced and unveiled."[22]

The argument could be made that Ephrem and the Syriac writers regarded typology as the very nature of created reality itself. It is not only that God chose types as means of revelation. Rather, creation is by its very nature revelatory and Christological. This is why the Syriac tradition finds types not only in Scripture but in all of nature.[23]

Perhaps the most striking literary form used by Ephrem and the Syriac fathers is paradox. In this approach, God's mysteriousness is preserved while events from human experience are juxtaposed antithetically as vehicles of meaning. Paradox is

20. Cited by Brock, "Word and Sacrament," 692.

21. Ephrem, *Nisibene Hymn, No. 50,* in Brock, *Harp,* 58.

22. Aimé Solignac, "Mystère," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1980), vol. 10, col. 1861.

23. Seely Beggiani, "The Typological Approach of Syriac Sacramental Theology," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 546.

the imagination's counterpart to the intellect's use of the principle of analogy. It is one way in which human speech can embody divine realities. For example, Ephrem in his *Hymn on the Nativity, No. 118* declares:

> The Mighty One entered and put on insecurity from Mary's womb;
> the Provisioner of all entered and experienced hunger;
> He who gives drink to all entered — and experienced thirst;
> naked and stripped there came forth from Mary He who clothes all.[24]

Jacob of Serugh uses the same method in his homilies:

> You yourself remain in grandeur and in smallness,
> and that is why anyone who wishes to speak trembles before you.
> If he tries to speak of your simpleness he perceives your overwhelming grandeur,
> contemplates it, and is stopped.
> And when he wishes to speak of your grandeur, he is embarrassed,
> seeing the sufferings and the abasement which happened to you.
> . . . . A sight without precedent, a young virgin giving of her milk;
> a great marvel, a death from which hurls forth life.
> The orator trembles from beginning to end,
> since the whole route is full of marvels which he contemplates.
> Seeing your sufferings, one thinks you are a man,
> seeing the prodigies and marvels, one knows that you are a God.[25]



The Maronite liturgy is filled with instances of paradox. The verse before the Scripture readings for Wednesday chants: "It is fitting to remember the Holy Virgin Mary because she carried in her womb God, who sustains the universe." The evening prayer of the divine office for Palm Sunday contains the

24. Brock, "Poet," 244.

25. Jansma, "Encore le credo de Jacques de Saroug: Nouvelles recherches sur l'argument historique concernant son orthodoxie," *L'Orient Syrien* 10 (1965): 334.

following verse before the Scripture readings: "He who rides on the clouds, rides today on an ass; he who the earth and the heavens bless, is blessed today by the mouths of children." And, the verse before the Scripture readings of morning prayer declares: "Today in Jerusalem children surround him whom the powers of light surround in heaven." The "prayer of forgiveness" for the morning office of Good Friday prays:

Incarnate Word, Son of Mary and Son of the Father, on this day, the greatest in all history, you were brought to trial scornfully before Pilate, you who are seated in glory at the right of your Father. You remain silent before your judges, but by it, you speak all things. You walk on the road to Golgotha carrying the wood of the cross, you who are seated on the throne of cherubim clothed in luminous raiment. On your head, the thorns are wreathed in a crown of derision, you whose head the heavens adorn with a crown of stars. On the cross you are given to drink of vinegar and gall, you who give us to drink your blood. Source of life, you die on the wood of the cross, you who do not cease to give life to all the living on earth.

CHRIST IN NATURE AND IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

As noted, Ephrem describes God the Father and Christ playing on two or three harps in manifesting themselves — namely, nature and the Old and New Testaments. In his *Hymn on Virginity, No. 29,* he speaks of the Word putting on a body and with his hands playing two harps. He places a third harp before his face as a witness for the other two.[26]

In the *Hymn on Virginity, No. 28,* Ephrem combines both the image of harps and the image of Christ as painter to explain how various sources of creation point to Christ and to the Father. Ephrem declares:

26. Yousif, "Symbolisme christologique," 62–63.

Who has ever played in such a marvelous and astonishing fashion,
And made a thousand cords vibrate together!
And composed with wisdom ancient things,
And also new things, with those of nature!
And since the image of the Creator is hidden in them,
On them, you have shown your outline;
And starting with them, the Lord of all appeared to us,
And also the Son of the Lord of all.
Dispersed symbols, You have gathered and
You have exposed the prototypes of your Announcing (Gospel)
And the prowess and signs borrowed from nature,
You have mixed such colors for your image;
You have contemplated Yourself (as in a mirror)
and You have painted Yourself,
O Painter who have painted Your Father in Yourself.
The One by the Other You have painted Yourself.[27]

In his *Hymn against Heresies, No. 28,* Ephrem reiterates these themes with the image of Christ as husbandman: "Look and see how nature and Scripture are yoked together for the Husbandman."[28] In his *Commentary on Genesis,* Ephrem presents Moses as incorporating the types of Christ in his writings: "He wrote about the mysteries of the Son that were inscribed when creatures were created. He also inscribed the types [of the Son] that were depicted in the just ones who preceded Him as well as the allegorical and symbolic meanings that were signified by the works of his staff."[29]

If the Christian follows the way of symbols, he will reach Christ. In fact, Ephrem, in the *Hymn on Virginity, No. 10,* portrays Christ as a "Blessed Sea," and symbols are a torrent of streams that empty into Christ.[30] In more than one place

27. Ibid., 59.
28. Cited by Brock, *Harp,* 10.
29. Ephrem, *St. Ephrem the Syrian,* ed. Matthews and Amar, 68–69.
30. Yousif, "Symbolisme christologique," 34.

Ephrem uses the image of streams to describe how Christ summarizes all that came before him. For example, in the *Hymn on Epiphany, No. 4,* he says:

> He is described in the Scriptures; He is signed in Nature;
> His crown is prefigured in kings, His truth in prophets:
> His atonement in priests.
> Behold, the prophets' glorious symbols;
> the priests and kings have poured out their wonderful types on him:
> all have directed all on Him.
> Christ overcame and surpassed all the mysteries of the Old Law by His teachings;
> the parables by His interpretations; as the sea receives all streams into its midst.[31]

Christ is the door of all goods, the term of all mysteries, and the treasure of all parables. Before him there were only symbols and shadows, with him there is the truth. Ephrem has a dynamic view of the mysteries of the Old Testament: they await Christ, march toward him, and they flow into Him. Pierre Yousif sees in this approach a principle of appropriation. Persons have passed but not their work or their mystery. Christ has taken royalty, prophecy, and priesthood. He takes something from us to give us something. What the symbols prefigure comes to reside in Christ.[32]

In his *Hymn on Virginity, No. 9,* Ephrem expresses the view that Christ especially, in his crucifixion, is the consummation of all mysteries and figures:

> At the coming of our Sun,
> The lamps have accomplished their task and passed

31. Thomas Joseph Lamy, *Sancti Ephraem Syri:Hymni et Sermones* (Malines: 1882–1902), vol. 1 (1882), cols. 47–50.

32. Yousif, "Symbolisme christologique," 9, 55; Louis Leloir, *Doctrines et méthodes de S. Ephrem d'après son commentaire de l'évangile concordant, originale syriaque et version armenienne*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 220, Subsidia 18 (Louvain: 1961), 41; El-Khoury, "Gen. 1:26 — Dans l'interprétation," 201.

And the figures and mysteries have ended;
by the invisible circumcision.
. . . .

For it is Christ who has achieved
the mysteries (of the Scriptures) by his wood.
Their figures by (in) his body,
their adornments by his beauty,
And they have all been consummated in him entirely![33]



The Maronite liturgy in the *soogitho* for the Thursday of Mysteries declares: "He [Christ] brought models and types to an end when he arose and lovingly washed their feet."

Ephrem's theology of symbol can be used to explain the work of redemption. Louis Leloir notes that Ephrem views the human body itself in the role of symbol. Every body that bears the sign of the first Adam is nourishment for death; but everyone who bears the sign of the second Adam is a master over death. Bodies die because they have sinned, and earth that is their mother has been cursed; but the body that is the church is incorruptible, and the earth of which it is born is blessed, for this earth is Mary, blessed among women. Since Adam died because of sin, it was necessary that Christ remove sin and thereby also remove death; his Eucharistic body replaces now the fruit of the tree, and the Eucharistic table has become for us the garden of Eden.[34]

In his *Hymn on Virginity, No. 11,* Ephrem gives several examples of how various things in nature produce their result through a form of suffering or self-destruction. For Ephrem they all symbolize the salvific suffering of Christ. He concludes by saying, "Behold all these things teach with their symbols that they release by their suffering the treasure of their riches;

33. Yousif, "Symbolisme christologique," 25–27.
34. Leloir, *Doctrines,* 43.

and that the suffering of the Son of the most Good is the key to his treasures."[35]

One final aspect of the idea of typology is that it is progressive. The "time of the church" is fulfillment or reality when compared to Old Testament types, but the church, on the other hand, is a type of the eschatological kingdom. According to Robert Murray, Ephrem portrays history as a road on which humanity has journeyed. In Ephrem's *Hymns against Heresies,* the way laid down by God stretches from the Tree (of Life) to the cross: from the "wood" to the "wood," and from Eden to Zion, from Zion to the holy church, and from the church to the kingdom.[36]

Presumed in God's revelation through types and symbols is the idea that humans are therefore free to accept or reject God's revelation. God does not deal with humans by force but respects freedom of choice. Ephrem explains:

> See his kindness! Though he could have made us fair by force, without toil,
> he has toiled in every way that we might become fair by our own choice,
> ourselves the artists of our own fairness
> using the colors our own freedom had gathered.[37]

As mentioned, in the Syriac view God is mysterious even in his revelation. On the one hand, the only proper human response to God is silence; on the other hand, God has manifested himself in created forms. Ephrem states the position very clearly:

> Man is too small to understand all languages:
> if he could understand the language of the watchful spirits,

35. Yousif, "Symbolisme christologiqe," 42.
36. Murray, "Theory of Symbolism," 8.
37. Ephrem, *Hymn on the Faith, No. 31,* in ibid., 17.

then perhaps he could rise to understand the silence
which is spoken between the Father and the Son.
Our language is foreign to the voice of animals,
the language of the Watchers to every language.
The silence in which the Father speaks to his Son
is foreign (even) to the Watchers.
O his kindness! as he put on all forms for us to see,
so he put on all voices in order to teach us.
His nature is one, it can be seen:
His silence is one it can be heard.[38]

38. Ephrem, *Hymn on the Faith, No. 11,* in ibid., 18.

4

INCARNATION

The incarnation represents the fullness of revelation and the climax of human creation. In its redemptive aspect it remedies the effects of sin. Sin had introduced disharmony between heaven and earth and among humankind. Humans created in the image of God now possessed a distorted image and were unable to benefit from the grace of God's indwelling. Sin had also led humans into darkness and ignorance. The Word of God, both the instrument and model of creation, now brings about its fulfillment in history. Possessed with the glory that he had from the beginning, he undergoes a second birth to reconcile heaven and earth and to enable humans to share again in the divine nature. Christ not only heals human sinfulness, but teaches us through his light and shows us the way to the Father. The Syriac fathers view Christ's redemptive work as resulting from his entry into three wombs: the womb of Mary, the waters of the Jordan, and the depths of *sheol.* (This very concept is affirmed in the Maronite Anaphora for the consecration of baptismal water when the celebrant states, "By your will, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, he abided in three places: in a womb of flesh, in the womb of baptism, and in the dark mansions of *sheol.*") By overcoming the kingdom of death and providing us with baptism, Christ brings about new life and new creation. In this chapter we will consider

the incarnation and its effects. We will study the meaning of the cross, death, and resurrection in the next chapter.

According to Ephrem the Word became incarnate to heal all creatures. He asked his Father to give him the glory that he possessed with the Father before the creation of the world: the glory with which he was clothed at the time creatures were created and with which humans had also been clothed. The Word sought this glory to restore the primitive harmony of creation.[1] In his *Commentary on the Gospel* 19.17, Ephrem explains:

[The Lord] also said, "Give me glory in your presence from that which you gave me before the world was made" (Jn 17:5). [This was] when the Father was fashioning creatures through his Son, according to the psalmist's account, "He is clothed with glory and magnificence" (Ps 104:1), after which he drew them out of nothingness and established them as spotless creatures.... Following Adam's fall creatures were clothed in humiliation, according to the Apostle's word, "creatures were subjected to futility" (Rom 8:20), and the Son of the Creator came to heal them.... [W]ishing to restore and accomplish the first order of creation, [he asked] for the glory with which he was clothed at the time when creatures were clothed [with glory].[2]

Ephrem uses a kind of analogy to show that just as the incarnation was a second birth for Christ, so humans must have a second birth to be redeemed. In a *Homily on Our Lord,* Ephrem states:

The First-Born who was begotten according to His nature, underwent yet another birth outside His nature, so that we too would understand that after our natural birth, we must undergo another birth outside our nature. As a spiritual being, He was unable to become physical until the time of physical birth. And so, too physical beings, unless they undergo another birth, cannot become spiritual.[3]

1. Leloir, *Doctrines,* 38–39.

2. Carmel McCarthy, trans., *St. Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 290–91.

3. Mathews and Amar, eds., *St. Ephrem the Syrian,* 275.



The Maronite liturgy reflects this idea of a double birth in the *sedro* for the fourth Sunday of Easter which says: "O Uncreated Son through whom all things were created, You were begotten of the Father from all eternity and were born of the Virgin Mary in the fullness of time."

"CLOTHED IN THE FLESH"

The most common term used by the Syriac fathers to describe the incarnation is that Christ "put on the body" or "clothed himself in the body." Aphrahat sees Jacob clothing Joseph as a type of the Father sending the Son to put on the body. According to Robert Murray, Aphrahat uses the phrase frequently and sees in the action of Christ's putting on the body a source of our resurrection. However, Aphrahat never develops the idea of the solidarity of Christ's body with our bodily nature.[4]

On the other hand, in his *Hymn on the Nativity, No. 9,* Ephrem speaks of Christ as a "maker" like His Father, who made himself in the womb and "put on a pure body." In his incarnation he brings mercy from his Father, and he "made our weakness put on glory."[5] Ephrem also speaks of the "garment [i.e., the body] of the Lord" as a vehicle of healing. In the "visible dress" of Christ "dwells hidden power."[6] Ephrem extends the image of clothing to describe the mystery of the Eucharist. In the *Hymn on the Faith, No. 19,* he explains:

Two dresses are yours, O Lord,
the garment [of] the body, and the Bread, the bread of life.
Who would not wonder at the dress of your changing?
See, the body veiled your splendor, your awesome nature.

4. Murray, *Symbols,* 69–70; 310.
5. Ephrem, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns,* trans. McVey, 125.
6. Murray, "Hymn of St. Ephrem," 143.

Your clothing veiled your weaker nature;
the bread veils the Fire that dwells within it.[7]

Murray speculates that the encratism of the *Acts of Thomas* might be influenced by the conviction that Christ, by "putting on the body," sanctified it and made continence possible.[8]



The Maronite liturgy preserves this image in the response to the Trisagion on the feast of Nativity with the prayer: "O Christ, who was clothed in the flesh, have mercy on us." The *Anaphora of Peter III,* in the prayer after the "Holy, Holy, Holy," declares: "You have clothed yourself with our humanity in order to give us life in your divinity."

THE RECONCILING OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

In the view of the Syriac fathers, the most pervasive effect of the incarnation was the reconciliation of the heavens and the earth. *In his Commentary on the Diatesseron,* Ephrem explains that Christ was at the same time both visible man and hidden God. In his incarnation Christ achieves the reconciliation of heaven and earth by his flesh being drawn to his divinity.[9] For Ephrem the act of *kenosis* is the act of reconciliation. In the *Hymn on the Nativity, No. 4,* he declares that by descending to earth and being born, the "Heavenly One" has reconciled heaven and earth.[10] In his *Hymn on the Unleavened Bread,* Ephrem expands on this idea and implies that it brings about human sanctification:

Your mercy, I admire
You have extended it to sinners

7. Ibid., 146–47.
8. Murray, *Symbols,* 311.
9. Leloir, *Doctrines,* 24.
10. Ephrem, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns,* trans. McVey, 91.

You impoverished your greatness to enrich our misery
so that we become, by your goodness in our regard
companions of the beings on high.[11]



The Maronite liturgy reflects this teaching in the *Anaphora of Peter III* which declares: "Yes, we ask You, unique Son of the Father, by whom Peace has conversed with us, Son of the Highest, in whom the high and low were reconciled." Also, in the "prayer of forgiveness" of the *Visitation to Elizabeth Sunday,* we find the following: "May we be worthy to praise, confess, and glorify the Lord of all eternity who hid Himself in the womb of a virgin; the "Ancient of Days" who has concealed himself in the virgin's temple; the everlasting God who joined heaven and earth by communing with a simple maiden." The *etro* prayer declares: "O Lord, you are peace who mediated between the heights and the depths." A *qolo* for the weekdays of Epiphany prays: "When he was baptized, he joined heights and depths." The *etro* of the morning office of the Dedication of the Church Sunday chants: "Lord, you are the living peace who reconciled heaven and earth."

SHARING IN THE DIVINE NATURE

As previously indicated, the second birth of Christ becomes the basis of our own divinization. Through the incarnation, humans, without ceasing to be so, take on a new dimension through baptism as sons and daughters of God. This was the role intended for humans from the beginning of creation. They had been created to be children of God, but through the misuse of free will had not fulfilled their intended role.[12]

Ephrem uses a variety of images to express this truth. In the

11. Jean Gribomont, "Les hymnes de Saint Ephrem sur la pâques," *Melto* 13 (1967): 154–55.

12. Brock, "Mary and the Eucharist: An Oriental Perspective," *Sobornost* 1, no. 2 (1979): 52.

Homily on our Lord, he speaks of the Word changing his dwelling place and thus bringing about our elevation. He states:

> Praise to you who set out from one haven and resided in another, to
> come and make us a haven for the One who sent you.
> The Only Begotten journeyed from the Godhead and resided in a virgin,
> so that through physical birth the Only-Begotten would become a brother to many.
> And he journeyed from *Sheol* and resided in the kingdom, to tread a path from
> *Sheol*, which cheats everyone, to the kingdom, which rewards everyone.[13]

Our sanctification through sharing a common humanity with Christ is explicitly stated in the *Homily on our Lord:* "Glory to the One who took from us in order to give to us, so that we should all the more abundantly receive what is His by means of what is ours."[14]

As will be noted, the sanctification of humans through incorporation into the divinity of Christ is extended through the mysteries (sacraments). Jesus receives the Spirit in baptism that we may also be born of the Spirit;[15] and the incorporation into Christ occurs especially in the Eucharist. Ultimately, this sanctification will occur in the Church.[16]



The Maronite liturgy celebrates this joining with Christ in the "prayer of intinction": "You have united, O Lord, your divinity with our humanity; and our humanity with your divinity; your life with our mortality and our mortality with your life.

13. Mathews and Amar, eds., *St. Ephrem the Syrian,* 273–74.
14. Ibid., 285.
15. Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity,* 103–4.
16. Murray, *Symbols,* 70.

> You have assumed what is ours and you have given us what is yours for the life and salvation of our souls. To you be glory forever." This same prayer is found in the *Anaphora of III Peter* and in the *sedro* of the morning office for Holy Thursday. This theme is also in the *sedro* of the Baptismal liturgy, which declares: "By sharing our human nature, weakened through Adam's sin, you enabled us to share in your divinity, and to receive the gift of life."
>
> The prayer after the "Holy, Holy, Holy" in the *Anaphora of John Chrysostom* declares: "Glory to you, God the heavenly Father, for you have exalted our weak human nature. In your mercy, you sent your only Son for our salvation. . . . He willingly became man to make us divine. He was born from a woman's womb, that we may be born again from a spiritual womb. He became our brother so that through his grace, we may become your children and heirs."

With this new creation is the dispelling of sin. In the *Nisibene Hymn, No. 35,* Ephrem explains: "Sin again said, it must be, that I forsake, and change from that which I am; for this Son of Mary who is come, as a new creation, has created mankind."[17]

"RENEWAL OF OUR 'IMAGE'"

For Ephrem the original image of Adam, disfigured and lost in the Fall, is found and restored by Christ as the "image of God." For the Christian, the ultimate restoration occurs in baptism and the new life of faith.[18]

In the *Homily on the Nativity,* Ephrem explains, "Of His love He came down to renew the image of Adam grown old." He goes on to say that the day of Christ's birth resembles the first day of creation. Just as creation was established on the first day, it is now renewed. The earth is now blessed, where with Adam's

17. Ephrem, *Nisibene Hymns,* in Schaff and Wace, *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* 13:226, 194.

18. Kronholm, *Motifs,* 66.

sin it had been cursed. Where death had been introduced into the world, with Christ we have life again.[19]

In his *Hymn on the Nativity, No. 1,* Ephrem explains that just as the Lord took on a different nature, so should humans by the nature of their free will overthrow their evil will. God imprinted his image on our humanity so that we bear the seal of his divinity.[20]

In his *Hymn on the Nativity, No. 17,* Ephrem extends the action of renewal to all of creation. Referring to the incarnate Word as the Son of the creator, he declares that Christ renewed the sky since humans had worshipped the stars. He also renewed the earth that had grown old because of the sin of Adam. Through his human nature he was able to heal bodies and minds.[21]



In the Maronite liturgy, the *Anaphora of James* declares that when humans had gone astray, God the Father did not abandon them but called them back by the law and the prophets; "and when the time was fulfilled You sent your Son into the world that He might renew your image." The *qolo* for the feast of Resurrection prays: "God the Father sent his Son, to make Adam's image new." The *sedro* of the evening office for the Wednesdays of Lent prays: "You have taken our image to give us yours; you have fasted from food and drink to redeem Adam who had eaten the forbidden fruit and so you have restored the image that human greediness had damaged, and have rendered to humans the assurance and joy that they had lost."

The prayer after the "Holy, Holy, Holy" in the *Anaphora of St. John* declares: "For our salvation, you sent your Son who descended, became flesh and was crucified for us who had cor-

19. Brock, *Harp,* 64–67.
20. Ephrem, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns,* trans. McVey, 74.
21. Ibid., 156.

rupted his image." In the divine liturgy, the prayer after the Preface of the *Anaphora of John the Evangelist* declares: "You sent Your Son who became man and suffered for us who distorted the image in which we were created."

CLOTHED WITH GLORY

In the Syriac mind, with the restoration of the image of God that Adam had distorted, comes the return of the "robe of glory." In the *Hymn on the Nativity, No. 5,* Ephrem explains that by his birth Christ exchanged radiance for shame — the shame that Adam had borne.[22] In the *Homily on the Nativity, No. 12,* Ephrem portrays Adam as rejoicing at the birth of Christ, because the glory that he lost has now been recovered.[23] In the *Hymn on the Nativity, No. 1,* Ephrem describes Eve as looking for Christ, since he will clothe her nakedness not with leaves, but with the same glory that she and Adam had exchanged away.[24]



The Maronite liturgy in the anaphora for the consecration of the waters of Baptism declares: "May those who enter them [the baptismal waters] and are baptized, be cleansed, purified, and clothed in the robe of justice." The "prayer of forgiveness" in the Sunday of the Resurrection prays: "As you [Christ] saved us by your passion and granted us life by your resurrection, so now clothe our bodies with the power of your Spirit, that we may all shine in the robe of glory and be able to meet you, O Christ, the true Bridegroom." A *qolo* for the liturgy for Sundays declares: "On Sunday the Lord rose in glorious splendor; He overcame suffering and destroyed and vanquished death. He brought back sinners and clothed them with the robe of glory."

22. Ibid., 106.
23. Brock, *Harp,* 67.
24. Ephrem, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns,* trans. McVey, 69.

The incarnation is also seen as a necessary action to help the needy and sinners. First of all, it is important that God be made visible. In the *Homily on our Lord,* Ephrem explains that the divine power in itself could not be handled and therefore had to put on a body that could be touched. Humans can draw near to him and by way of his humanity can discern his divinity.[25] Ephrem sees in Christ's putting on a created body the way to capture humans and draw them closer to God. In the *Hymn on the Nativity, No. 21,* he says:

> God had seen that we worshipped creatures.
> He put on a created body to catch us by our habit.
> Behold by this fashioned one our Fashioner healed us.
> and by this creature our Creator revived us.
> His force did not govern us. Blessed is He Who came in what is ours,
> and mingled us in what is His.[26]

Ephrem believes that Christ's miracles of healing were also occasions for teaching. In the *Hymn on the Unleavened Bread* he explains:

> He is perfect in his goodness
> for he has combined his liberalities
> and his teaching.
> The possessed he has cured;
> in curing them, he has taught them.
> They have received to be taught.
> By the fact of being healed, they were taught.[27]



The theme of the teaching role of the incarnate Christ is reflected in the Maronite liturgy. The *sedro* of the morning of-

25. Ibid., 326.

26. Ibid., 176. The same theme is repeated in Ephrem's *Hymn on the Nativity, No. 22.*

27. Gribomont, "Hymnes," 154–55.

> fice of the fourth Sunday of Lent prays: "You have sent your only Son so that the world know you and love you as you have loved Him. Christ our God, to you thanksgiving, you who made yourself like us to teach us the way which leads to the Father." In the *sedro* of the evening office for Wednesday, Christ is described in this way: "You have come, walked on earth and have traced for us a way which leads to the heavens."

THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST

As previously indicated, the progress of the incarnation is seen to involve three wombs or "staging points": Mary's womb, the womb of the Jordan, and the womb of *sheol.* Jacob of Serugh explains:

> He completed his whole course by three staging points:
> he resided in the virgin and came to birth, though he was God;
> he received baptism, yet he was God;
> and he descended to *sheol,* and the world recognized that he was God.

For Jacob, Christian baptism has its origin in two different moments of the incarnation—Christ's baptism in the Jordan and the piercing of his side on the cross. The salvific and sacramental effects of these events will be discussed in the chapter on Christian initiation.

Since John is "the son of Levites," Christ's baptism at his hands provides the means by which the Jewish priesthood is transmitted to Christianity. This teaching is found in early Syriac tradition.[28] In his *Hymn on the Nativity, No. 4,* Ephrem says that the preexistent Word made flesh gave the laying on of hands to Moses and he received it in turn from John at the Jordan.[29]

28. Brock, "Baptismal Themes in the Writings of James of Sarugh," *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 205 (1978): 325–36.

29. Ephrem, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns,* trans. McVey, 104.

In the Maronite baptismal liturgy, a prayer during consecrating of the waters declares: "Blessed are you, O Lord God, for you purified and sanctified these waters by the power of the glorious Trinity, and they became a new womb, giving birth to spiritual children."

DOCTRINE ON CHRIST

Ephrem and the Syriac fathers affirm the Nicene teaching of the equality of the Word with the Father and adopt a descending Christology. The Nicene belief is clear in the prayer cited in Ephrem's *Letter to Publius:*

Look at . . . the ray of his light. . . at him who is equal in essence with his begetter, at him whose nature is commensurate with that from which he sprang, at him who is near to him, yet far from him, at him who is mingled with him, yet distant from him, who is with him and is not distant, at his right hand and not far off.[30]

In the Syriac mind the divinity of Christ was always operating. While accepting his true humanity, it affirms the paradox that in every moment of the human life of Christ, the divinity of Christ was controlling the world. Ephrem in the *Hymn on the Nativity, No. 4* presents this belief with poetic paradox. He speaks of the infant Christ still giving commands to all creation, for he is the one who is the source of being. While he was in the womb, he was forming infants in their wombs. While he walked the earth he was guiding creation. Being God, it was he who received the praise of angels and humans. On the cross it was his power that darkened the sun, made the earth quake, and opened the graves to release the dead.[31]

On the other hand, in Ephrem's view, Christ was the per-

30. Brock, "Ephrem's Letter to Publius," 278.
31. Ephrem, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns,* trans. McVey, 100–102.

fect human. In his *Commentary on the Diatesseron,* he describes Christ as free from all sin and concupiscence. He had no failings and could not be deceived. Since Christ came as a doctor, he could not be morally ill; and since he is the shepherd, he could not go astray; nor as teacher, could he err; and being the light, he could not stumble. Therefore, Christ was perfect from his conception to his resurrection.

However, after all of our theologizing, we are reminded that we are dealing with mystery. In the incarnation we still encounter the hiddenness of God. In the *Hymn on Nativity, No. 13,* Ephrem declares:

> If anyone seeks Your hidden nature
> behold it is in heaven in the great womb
> of Divinity. And if anyone seeks
> Your revealed body, behold it rests and looks out
> from the small womb of Mary!
> ....Who will measure You,
> Great Sea Who made Himself small?[32]

Ephrem did not deal with the incarnation in Greek philosophical terms. As has been noted, he expresses its truth in the richness of imagery. The term that he was mostly likely to use regarding the two natures of Christ was "mingle" (*mzag* in Syriac), which he uses of Christ and to express the union of humans with him by grace and the sacraments.[33]

SCHEMA

Jacob of Serugh deals with the incarnation by using the term *schema.* For him, it represents a "manner or mode of existence." For example, the *schema* of a monk might be to live in the city, or in a monastery, or as a solitary. Therefore, Jesus is God by

32. Ibid., 138.
33. Murray, "Hymn of St. Ephrem," 147.

nature, but in the image and *schema* of a human. He came to dwell in the womb of the virgin in the *schema* of a man, so that Mary became a "sealed letter full of secrets." Jacob says, "And in the *schema* of servants he visited the servants and freed them."[34]

The idea of *schema* is a possible model for explaining the doctrine of the incarnation. For Jacob, a thought (word) can exist in two *schemata* at the same time: in one *schema,* in the mind of the writer of a letter, and in a second, in the form of writing on a page. In the first *schema* the word is intangible and unlimited; in the second, it is both tangible and limited. No one has access to the thought in the mind of another person, so long as it is in his mind; on the other hand, one has immediate access to the same thought if it is written down.[35]

In a further theological development, some Syriac writers see all of humanity as being divinized in the incarnation and union of the divine. For example, Roberta Chesnut observes that Jacob of Serugh conceived of human nature as a concrete collective. The Word was not only united to the individual humanity of Jesus, but rather, through Jesus, was joined to the whole human race. She claims that Jacob does not make a clear distinction between the "mixture" of the Word and humanity in general and the "mixture" of divinity and humanity in Jesus. By the Word being joined to humanity, the Father is brought into close relationship with the human race, and in this regard the term "mixture" is again used. Chesnut refers to *Letter 19* of Jacob, which says that Christ came "for his Father that he should be a Father for us … and he mixed us with respect to genus with his begetter."[36]

34. Cited by Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies,* 115, 122–23.
35. Ibid., 123–24.
36. Ibid., 135.

5

REDEMPTION

The Syriac fathers do not separate the redemption from the incarnation of Christ in their theology. The word of God from the beginning of time desired in his "tenderness" to restore his image in humans who had distorted it through sin. In a continuous movement, the Word humbles himself and becomes flesh, enters the womb of Mary, the waters of the Jordan, and the mouth of *sheol* (i.e., the region of the dead), where he overcomes death and leads all humans on a path that takes them to the kingdom of the Father. The two events most focused on are the death on the cross and the descent into *sheol.* The cross becomes the victorious cross and the new "tree of life." The mysteries of baptism, the Eucharist, crowning (i.e., marriage), and the church are all seen as flowing from the event of the cross. The "descent into *sheol*" provides the imagery for the ultimate conquering of death and the prince of the underworld. Ephrem sees the whole life of Christ as redemptive. The death of Christ is the culmination of the "descent" of the Son into our world, living in humility by which he hid his mystery. Salvation results from the ascent to the right hand of the Father, triumphant over sin.[1] It is through the interweaving of

1. Gribomont, "Le triomphe de pâques d'après S. Ephrem," *Parole de l'Orient* 4 (1973): 148, 158–59, 185.

various themes and imagery that the Syriac fathers developed their teaching on redemption.

Jean Gribomont claims that Ephrem ignores the Pauline doctrine of redemption and focuses on Old Testament typology. On the one hand, the themes of creation and paradise and the paschal Lamb are prominent. On the other hand, the mystery of salvation itself is the person of Christ. The most beautiful verses in Ephrem on redemption are those that contemplate hidden divinity on the cross, in contrast with the darkness of Golgotha.[2]

Ephrem, in his *Commentary on Exodus,* is clear in considering the sacrifice of Christ as fulfillment of the "type" represented by the first Passover lamb. He cites Exodus 12:2–7 as directing that a lamb be procured on the tenth of Nisan and slaughtered on the fourteenth. He then observes:

> The lamb is the type of our Lord, who entered the womb on the tenth of Nisan [Ephrem's calculation of the date of the Annunciation to Mary].... And so, on the tenth [of Nisan] when the lamb was confined, our Lord was conceived. And on the fourteenth, when [the lamb] was slaughtered, its type was crucified.[3]

DEATH ON THE CROSS

The Sacrifice of the Cross

Ephrem is explicit in stressing the redemptive sacrifice of Christ. He declares, "For the unpurified priests were not worthy to offer the Immaculate Lamb. So He became the victim of peace. And He reconciled the heights and the depths by his blood which pacified all."[4] Ephrem develops a similar theme in his *Hymns on Virginity.* He describes Christ as the "acceptable

2. Gribomont, "Hymnes," 171–82.

3. Mathews and Amar, eds., *St. Ephrem the Syrian,* 246–47.

4. Ephrem, *Hymn on the Unleavened Bread, No. 2,* 6, cited in Yousif, "Le sacrifice et l'offrande chex Saint Éphrem de Nisibe," *Parole de l'Orient* 15 (1988–89): 21–40, at 24.

offering, a sacrifice self-offered with power to make us holy." Christ supersedes the blood of the animals of the old covenant. He is the lamb who is also the priest.[5]

Also, for Ephrem the Eucharist is the "mystery" of that sacrifice. In describing the actions at the Last Supper, Ephrem explains, "He broke the bread with his hands in the mystery of the sacrifice of his Body; and he mixed the chalice with his hands in the mystery of the sacrifice of his Blood. It is he who is immolated and offers, being the priest of our atonement."[6]

The Cross Reconciles Heaven and Earth

Ephrem relates the announcement of the angels at the birth of Christ with the work achieved through the cross. In his *Commentary on the Diatesseron* he explains:

> When he descended on the earth and put on humanity, the angels exclaimed: "Peace on earth." And when humanity mounted and was raised, plunged in divinity and seated at its right, children exclaimed before it: "Peace in the heavens, blessing in the heights." It is thus the Apostle was taught to say: by the blood of his cross, he has purified all that is in the heavens and on the earth.[7]

In his *Hymn on the Epiphany, No. 2,* Ephrem speaks of the dead receiving life through the death of Christ and clearly states the reconciliation of the heavens and the earth. He says:

> In the thirtieth year let them give thanks with us,
> the dead that have lived through His dying,
> the living that were converted by His Cross,
> and heaven and earth have been reconciled in Him![8]

5. Murray, "Hymn of St. Ephrem," 41; see also Ephrem, *Nisibine Hymn, No. 66,* in *Nisibene Hymns,* in Schaff and Wace, *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* 13:218.

6. Ephrem, *Hymn on the Unleavened Bread, No. 2,* 7, in Yousif, "Sacrifice," 27.

7. Yousif, "Le symbolisme de la croix dans la nature chez Saint Ephrem," *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 205 (1978): 215.

8. Lamy, *Sancti Ephraem,* cols. 25–28.

Ephrem extends the redemptive work to the ascension when, in the *Hymni Dispersi, No. 22,* he praises Christ who by his humility saves us and gave us peace through his cross, and "elevated us by his Ascension."[9]

While Jacob of Serugh focuses more on the descent of Christ into *sheol,* his view is that as a result of the cross the human race is now in a new condition. The great wall of enmity separating the upper and lower beings from each other has been broken down; God and humans are no longer angry with each other. In fact, Jacob uses the term "to mix" to describe the way in which the Word incarnate brought about a reconciliation between the two "sides," God and humanity, who were angry with each other, bringing them into a state of peace. Roberta Chesnut cites Jacob of Serugh as saying:

> The love of God was revealed to the world in the cross of his son, and that cross broke down the wall of enmity which the Seprent built between Adam and God, and he released the decree of that death which was given to Adam for the transgression of the commandment. And he made peace between upper beings and lower ones and he mixed the sides in each other that the first enmity should be forgotten.[10]



The Syriac *Anaphora of St. Celestine* reflects the reconciling work of the cross in its prayer of peace: "O God, Immeasurable Sea of Tranquility and ever-flowing spring of love, by the cross of your only-begotten Son, you have removed all obstacles to harmony. You have bestowed peace and united heavenly and earthly creatures. By the power of your lordship, You have reconciled the world." And the Maronite evening office for the Exaltation of the Cross declares: "Blessed be the cross, it is by it that peace reigns between the heights and the depths, may the light spread on the earth."

9. Cited by Youssif, "Symbolisme de la croix," 212.
10. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies,* 117–35.

The Cross as Bridge

If the cross is reconciler, it is natural that it should serve as a bridge between death and life. This viewpoint is also influenced by belief that the cross as "tree" overcomes the sin that came through the tree in paradise. Ephrem explains in his *Homily on the Lord,* "This is the Son of the skilled carpenter who set up His cross over all-consuming *Sheol* and conducted humanity over to the place of life. Since humanity fell into *Sheol* because of a tree, it passed over to the place of life upon a tree."[11]

The Syriac fathers also draw a contrast between the sword the angel carried to keep humans out of paradise and the lance that pierced the side of Christ. Ephrem explains in his *Hymn on the Cross:*

Blessed are you, O living Wood [of the Cross],
For you have become a lance hidden for death;
In effect, the Son struck by the lance, has killed death
at the moment where the lance pierced Him.
His lance has abolished the lance,
For his pardon has torn up the written act
[of our condemnation],
Behold Paradise of the blessed where those
who ought to come out have entered
And where the rejected [have recovered]their home.[12]



The *mazmooro* for the divine liturgy for Saturdays chants: "May your cross be a bridge for the departed who wear the robe of baptism to cross into the refuge of life."

11. Mathews and Amar, eds., *St. Ephrem the Syrian,* 280; see also Youssif, "Symbolisme de la croix," 221.

12. Yousif, "La croix de Jesus et le paradis d'Eden dans la typologie biblique de Saint Ephrem," *Parole de l'Orient* 6–7 (1975–76): 46.

The Church as Bride at the Cross

The redemption achieved on the cross is also the source of the establishment of the church. For the Syriac fathers the church is the bride of Christ in the Jordan, but wedded to him on the cross, where her dowry is written in the blood that flowed from the side of Christ. The blood and water are also seen as symbols of baptism and the Eucharist, which make humans children of the Father and part of the saved assembly. Jacob of Serugh states:

> The Bridegroom's side has been pierced, and from it the Bride has come forth,
> fulfilling the type provided by Adam and Eve.
> For from the beginning God knew and depicted Adam and Eve
> in the likeness of the image of his only-begotten;
> He slept on the cross as Adam had slept his deep sleep,
> his side was pierced and from it there came forth the Daughter of Light,
> — water and blood as image of divine children to be heirs to the Father
> who love his Only-begotten.
>
> ....
>
> The stillness of the sleep of death fell upon him on the cross
> and from him came forth the Mother who gives birth to all spiritual beings.
>
> ....
>
> The King's Son made a marriage feast, in blood on Golgotha;
> there the Daughter of Day was betrothed to him, to be his,
> and the royal ring was beaten out in the nails of his hands;
> with his holy blood was the betrothal made.
> He took her hand there, seeing that she had shown her love for him
> at the hour of his shame; he set her at his right hand, to be with him.
> He led her into the Garden — the bridal chamber he had prepared for her.[13]

13. Cited by Brock, "The Mysteries Hidden in the Side of Christ," *Sobornost* 7, no. 6 (1978): 463–67.



> The Maronite liturgy speaks about the wedding of Christ and the Church at Golgatha. The evening office for Thursdays during the Season of Resurrection prays in its *etro:* "O Christ, as you hung on the cross your Church sprang forth from your wounded side, as Eve came out of the side of Adam in paradise." In the "prayer of forgiveness" of Cana Sunday it prays: "May we be worthy to praise, confess, and glorify the Bridegroom who betrothed the Church with his blood and sacrificed himself for her." And, the "prayer of forgiveness" of the "wedding liturgy" prays to "Jesus Christ, the heavenly bridegroom, who, in the self-giving of His death on the cross, established an everlasting love and fidelity toward His Bride, the Church."

Reflecting on the symbolism of the wood as ultimately a figure of the cross, Ephrem with complex imagery sees the ark of Noah as symbol of the cross, of the church, and of baptism. In his *Hymn on the Faith, No. 49,* he describes how the ark symbolized the cross and the "rudder of its pilot" who came to construct the church "on the waters." Christ saves in the name of the Trinity, and the Spirit in place of the "dove" gives his salvific anointing.[14]

Jacob of Serugh offers a profound insight into the theology of marriage by seeing in every marriage of man and woman a reflection of the mystery of the wedding of church to Christ. However, this mystery was not unveiled until the crucifixion and the subsequent teaching of St. Paul. Jacob of Serugh in a *Homily on Moses' Veil* explains:

> The hidden Father betrothed a bride to his only-begotten,
> having instructed her through prophecy in a symbolic way.
> In his love he built a great palace for the bride of light
> and depicted the bridegroom in various ways in her royal home.

14. Yousif, "Symbolisme de la croix," 218–19.

Moses entered in and, like a skilled artist, delineated
the bridegroom and the bride, and then covered the great picture
with a veil.
He put in his writings that "a man should leave his father and mother
and cleave to his wife, so that the two of them might be one
completely."
. . . . He covered up his words by various means, hiding them from
outsiders.
And so he painted a picture inside the chamber of the royal
bridegroom;
he called them "man and woman," although he knew the truth,
that the one was Christ and the other the church, both being veiled. . . .
After the wedding feast [i.e., the redemptive mysteries] Paul entered in
and beheld the veil lying there; he seized and removed it from the fair
couple
. . . and began to show what the covered picture was:
"in those called "man and wife" in the prophetic writings I recognize
Christ and his church, the two being one."
The betrothed made the daughter of day to enter a new
womb,
and the testing waters of baptism were in labour and gave rebirth to
her:
he rested in the water and invited her:
she went down clothed herself in him and ascended.[15]

Baptism and the Eucharist

As already noted, the cross is seen as the source of baptism. For Jacob of Serugh, "Christ came and opened up baptism on his cross. . . . Water and blood, for the fashioning of spiritual children flowed, and Baptism became the mother of the living."[16]

15. Brock, "Jacob of Serugh on the Veil of Moses," *Sobornost* 3 (1981): 74–75; see also D. O. Rousseau, in his introduction to Alphonse Raes, *Le mariage, sa célébration et sa spiritualité dans les églises d'Orient* (Chevetogne, Belgium: Editions de Chevetogne, 1959), 13–16.

16. Cited by Brock, "Baptismal Themes," 329–33.

> The Maronite liturgy restates this teaching in the *epiklesis* over the baptismal water when it declares: "Let it [the water] become as the water that flowed from the side of your only Son upon the cross, so that it may purify and cleanse all who are baptized in it."

The Cross as "Tree of Life"

With their feel for imagery, the Syriac fathers saw an intimate connection between the cross of Calvary and the tree of the garden of Eden and ultimately the "tree of life." In fact, according to legend the cross was the descendent of the tree of life by its seeds.[17] Ephrem in his *Hymn on Virginity* declares:

> He has come among us in his love, he, the blessed tree!
> The wood [of the cross] has abolished the wood,
> the fruit has been suppressed by the fruit and
> the tormentor by the Living One.[18]

Ephrem points to the connection more bluntly in his *Nisibene Hymn, No. 58:*

> The bosom and wings of the Cross, He opened in his mercy:
> its pinions bowed and bore the nations, to go to Eden.
> It is akin to the Tree of Life, and unto the son of its stock:
> it leads its beloved that on its boughs, they may feed on its fruits.[19]

In the *Armenian Hymn, No. 49,* Ephrem contrasts the Old Testament reference to water coming forth from the rock to nourish the Jews, to the cross as a font of life and nourishment for the Gentiles, who are now the "Church of the Nations." He explains that just as the water from the rock strengthened the

17. Murray, *Symbols,* 323–24.
18. Yousif, "Croix de Jesus," 41–42.
19. Ephrem, *Nisibene Hymns,* in Schaff and Wace, *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* 13:212.

Jewish people, so the cross is a fountain of life for the Gentiles. While the sword had guarded the tree of life, now the "Lord of the Tree" has given himself as food for the Gentiles. As Adam had food from the trees of paradise, so the "Planter of Eden" has become food for us. While we went forth from paradise with Adam, now that the Christ has removed the lance, we are able to reenter.[20]

Robert Murray is of the opinion that the use of oil or chrism in Christian initiation and other rites of anointing might be connected to the idea that consecrated oil comes from the tree of life, which also at times is used as a symbol of Christ.[21]



The Maronite liturgy speaks about the cross as the tree of life in the *sedro* of the morning office for the Exaltation of the Cross. It prays: "In paradise the tree of life symbolized your cross, and Moses showed a sign of it when he extended his arms to save the people. . . . It is the wood of the cross of which the wood of the ark of Noah, vessel of salvation, was the image."

Whether it be that the cross was seen as a symbol of the work of redemption or that it possessed mystical qualities as the tree of life, or the tradition that the act of being "signed" affords protection, there are a number of references in the Maronite liturgy to the cross as a defense against evil. In the second prayer of thanksgiving of the *Anaphora of St. Peter,* the celebrant petitions: "Protect them by your cross, be their shelter and refuge." In the same *sedro* cited in the above excerpt, the prayer continues: "Be for us night and day the attentive guardian which does not permit evil to overcome us." The office goes on in the "chant before the Scripture readings" to pray: "May your cross be a protective rampart for the Church your spouse and may evil not overcome her children." The dismiss-

20. Brock, "Mysteries," 471.
21. Murray, *Symbols,* 323–24.

al prayer of the *Anaphora of St. Peter* petitions: "Lord, bless all the faithful who humble themselves before you and imprint on them the victorious sign of your cross that they may be protected from every evil, known and unknown."

Nevertheless, in speaking of the death of Christ on the cross, Ephrem and the Syriac writers are aware continually of his abiding divinity. Ephrem in his *Hymn on the Unleavened Bread* expresses the paradox: "It is by the power which comes from him [Jesus] that the wood bore him; and the wood has not burnt even though it carried fire!"[22]

A good summary on the significance of the cross for the theology of redemption is found in Ephrem's writings, which, as previously indicated, describe the going out and ultimate return of Christ. Ephrem explains:

The Merciful one has looked down
and has seen the soul in the abyss
and has opened a way for it to extricate itself.
Even if a [simple] sign on his part would suffice,
He has imprinted his love on his work, in putting on humanity;
[then] he appropriated [human] ignorance
to lead humans to his knowledge.
He has chanted to humans on his harp his humble chants
so that humans be raised to the heights;
He has raised his cross toward the heights
so that the children [of Eve] climb toward the heavenly [beings].[23]

THE DESCENT INTO SHEOL AND RESURRECTION

It is the descent into *sheol* that completes the work of redemption. The kingdom of death must be defeated, and deceased humans, especially Adam, must be liberated and recovered.

22. Yousif, "Croix de Jesus," 37.
23. Cited by Yousif, "Symbolisme de la croix," 215n16; see also 216n20.

Jacob of Serugh, influenced by Philippians 2:16, usually speaks of the Son of God, who has the appearance of a servant and is not recognized by the demons because of his humility and suffering. Christ's true identity is revealed in the crucifixion. By his descent into *sheol,* he triumphs over the empire of death and returns gloriously to the Father in the company of liberated prisoners.[24]

Jacob of Serugh has Christ seeking the lost Adam even on the occasion of his baptism. He presents Christ as saying to John the Baptizer, "I am trying to find the lost Adam; let me go down and look for Adam." In fact, Christ's baptism and the descent into *sheol* are often considered together.[25]

The descent into *sheol* is the principal image used by the Syriac fathers to describe the cosmic struggle between Christ, who ultimately is the creator of life, and the power of death and sin. Jesus by the instrumentality of the cross had to overcome the "dragon-serpent." Humanity left to itself, in which sin reigned, was incapable of overcoming the dragon. It is Christ, the victorious king and son of David, who by his glorious cross has reduced the powerful evil one to silence.[26]

For the Syriac fathers the action of Christ's descent into *sheol* becomes a guarantee of life and resurrection for all humans. Ephrem observes that only Christ could go to a place from where no one could come out and then come forth without any power being able to hinder him.[27]

In the *Nisibene Hymns, No. 37,* Ephrem explains that only the creator could be in reality the redeemer. He says:

> No other strange key into the gate of *sheol* could ever be fitted.

24. Jansma, "Encore le credo," 336.
25. Brock, "Baptismal Themes," 328.
26. Yousif, "Croix de Jesus," 44.
27. Javier Teixidor, "Le thème de la descente aux infers chez saint Ephrem," *L'Orient Syrien* 6 (1961): 26.

One is the key of the Creator, that which has opened it,
yes, it is to open at his coming.
Who is he that is able to join the bones, save that Power which created them.
What is it that shall reunite the shreds of the body, save the hand of the Maker?
What is it that shall restore the forms, save the finger of the Creator?
He, who created and turned and destroyed, is He that is able also to renew and raise up.
Another God is unable to enter in and restore creatures not his own.[28]

Ephrem also explains that Christ's work was a free act of his will that overcame death against death's will. He also points out that it was necessary for Christ to have a body if this confrontation with death was to occur. In a *Homily on our Lord,* he says:

He is the one who submitted and endured death, as it willed, in order to overthrow death, contrary to (death's) will. Our Lord carried his cross and set forth as death willed. But on the cross He called out and brought the dead out of *Sheol,* contrary to death's will.

.... Since death was unable to devour Him without a body, or *Sheol* to swallow Him without flesh, He came to a virgin to provide Himself with a means to *Sheol.*[29]

There are various images used to describe how death was defeated. Ephrem makes the declaration that Jesus is victorious because he is indeed the "Living One." He says in the *Hymn on the Nativity, No. 4,* "By death the Living One emptied *Sheol.* He tore it open and let entire throngs flee from it."[30] More concretely, Ephrem in *Nisibene Hymn, No. 36* refers to Christ as the "medicine of life." He presents death as saying, "The medicine of life has entered *sheol* and brought its dead back to life. Who

28. Ephrem, *Nisibene Hymns,* in Schaff and Wace, *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* 13:199.

29. Mathews and Amar, eds., *St. Ephrem the Syrian,* 277–78.

30. Ephrem, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns,* trans. McVey, 92.

is it who has introduced for me and hidden the living fire in which the cold and dark wombs of *sheol* melt?"[31]

From the idea that Jesus is the medicine of life there developed the theory that while death is portrayed as the devourer of humans, he not only could not swallow Christ, but rather "disgorged" Christ and all other human beings with him. In the *Homily on the Lord* Ephrem explains that Mary conceived new life from the ancient vine of Eve, and when death came to feed on "mortal fruit," he swallowed the "life, the killer of death." Having swallowed the medicine of life, death was sickened and vomited forth all the living ones that he had previously swallowed.[32] Jacob of Serugh adopts the same imagery, but claims that Christ acted as a poison within death and that death choked on him and died.[33]

In the *Hymn on the Epiphany, No. 2,* Ephrem presents Christ in an active role: "Let [us] give thanks to the Son, for He it was Who on his feet entered s*heol* and spoiled it and came forth; blessed be His Resurrection." More specific are the references to Christ as the light who removes darkness from *sheol.* In *Nisibene Hymn, No. 41,* Ephrem declares, "Death opened the gates of *sheol* and there shone from it the splendor of the face of our Lord."[34]

Ephrem even uses the imagery of Christ as wheat sown in *sheol* itself. He describes Christ as a seed of wheat who falls to *sheol,* but springs up as a "whole sheaf, as the new Bread."[35]



The Maronite liturgy has many references to the victory over *sheol.* The *qolo* for the Monday after Resurrection liturgy

31. Brock, *Harp,* 44.

32. Mathews and Amar, eds., *St.Ephrem the Syrian,* 278–79.

33. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies,* 117.

34. Ephrem, *Nisibene Hymns,* in Schaff and Wace, *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* 13:205.

35. Brock, *Harp,* 27–29.

prays: "He who gives life has again come to life. Still incorrupt, he returned from s*heol;* He released the captives there, and destroyed it for evermore. . . . He slept in death and gave hope to the dead. He destroyed death and all its power, then awoke, and in glory rose." In the evening office for the feast of the Resurrection, the *qolo* prays: "To the glory of the Father, governor of all creatures, who has sent His only Son to renew his corrupted image. By his will he has opened the tomb, he has overwhelmed death and destroyed *sheol.* He reigns on earth and in heaven." A *qolo* for the Sunday of the Resurrection declares: "He rose and destroyed death, demolished the nether world, and established his reign in heaven and on earth." Another *qolo* at the "Rite of Peace" of that Sunday chants: "The mighty One stormed s*heol* and conquered death. He entered s*heol* and destroyed it." The "prayer of forgiveness" for the weekdays during the Season of the Resurrection declares: "O mighty One, you visited the abode of the dead and freed those who were held captives there." The *sougito* of the office adds: "Hell [*sheol*] full of dead has become a desert, while the interior of the garden of Eden is filled with a crowd. Our savior has risen and he has raised with him all the saints who were asleep. . . . We render thanks to his mercies, because by his resurrection, he has liberated Adam from his slavery." Finally, the *bo'uto dmar Ya'qub* of the same office uses legendary imagery when it says: "The Powerful One of the ages roared in *sheol* and its foundations tottered. And death lamented and lost his crown, becoming a mockery."[36] The "Hymn of Light" of morning prayer declares: "Death is annihilated, night has vanished, and the gates of s*heol* are broken. Creatures lying in darkness from ancient times are clothed in light. The dead arise from the dust and sing because they have a savior."

The Maronite office for Easter also declares the following about Christ in its *sedro:* "You performed marvels during your

36. Khalifé-Hachem, "Office maronite du grand dimanche de la résurrection: Texte du Ramso et commentaire," *Parole de l'Orient* 6–7 (1975–76): 290–97.

> stay among the dead; you have liberated prisoners by your resurrection; you have dispersed the darkness from the creatures on whom perdition had reigned; by your voice of life you have awakened the souls of just and righteous humans, who had reposed in the sleep of death. Reducing to nothing the power of the merciless enemy, you have made calm and peace to reign in hell [*sheol*], and you have gathered the people so that they adore you and announce your salvation in the entire world."
>
> The second prayer of the morning office for Lazarus Saturday declares: "O Christ, you are the Light which dissipates the darkness of hell; you have illumined the places of the dead." The entrance hymn for the Maronite feast of Resurrection chants: "When Isaiah saw his Lord, he cried out asking: 'O Son of God, who has dyed your garments red as blood?' Jesus then replied: 'I have trampled death itself to save my loved ones, and the blood of conquered death has stained my garments.'"

The descent into *sheol* has as its ultimate purpose the liberating of Adam. In the mind of the Syriac writers, Adam was the original image of God and the representative of all humans. Ephrem dwells on this theme often in his *Nisibene Hymns.* In *Nisibene Hymn, No. 65,* he speaks of Christ descending and plunging after Adam to deliver him from *sheol* and restore him to Eden.[37] The redemption of Adam is linked to the "Mysteries" that came forth from the side of Christ. In *Nisibene Hymn, No. 39,* Ephrem explains, "There came out from Him water and blood; Adam washed and lived, and returned to Paradise."[38]

In the liberating of Adam, all humans are saved. In his *Nisibene Hymn, No. 36,* Ephrem portrays death as speaking to Christ

37. Ephrem, *Nisibene Hymns,* in Schaff and Wace, *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* 13:216; see also Ephrem, *Nisibene Hymns 54 and 61,* in ibid., 13:208, 213.

38. Ibid., 201.

as king and asking him to take Adam as "booty." Since all the dead were hidden in Adam, they have been vivified by Christ in his coming to *sheol.* Not only does death surrender Adam, but since Christ now reigns over all, death in submission will have all the dead rise to meet Christ at the sound of the trumpet.[39]

Roberta Chesnut points out that Jacob of Serugh sees the necessity of Christ's going to *sheol* not just to liberate Adam, but to save "the Great Adam" or "the Great Image," the image of the Father. For Jacob, "the image of God was perishing in *sheol,* and the Son descended to seek and find the image of his Father which was perishing." Therefore, the title of Christ as "the second Adam" has great significance for Jacob.[40]



In the Maronite liturgy, a *qolo* verse for the Sunday of the Birth of John the Baptizer chants: "Awake, O weary Adam. Did you question God's plan? He is coming in the flesh to rouse you from sleep." The *mazmoro* [literally, psalm verse] for the Sunday after Epiphany declares: "Glory to You, O Abundant Giver, who rose incorruptible from the tomb. You raised the body of Adam and returned to Him who sent you." The evening office of the Resurrection in its *qolo* chants about Christ: "He has given joy by his resurrection to Adam who lay in *sheol,* has liberated him with all his children and led them to paradise full of happiness."[41]

OTHER EFFECTS OF THE REDEMPTION

Light and Truth

Light is a primordial symbol of God and has been used biblically to manifest the themes of truth and goodness. Sin is char-

39. Cited by Teixidor, "Théme," 37.
40. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies,* 127 ff.
41. Khalifé-Hachem, "Office maronite," 289.

acterized by darkness, ignorance, and confusion. Therefore, one of the direct effects of Christ's redemptive work is the reappearance of light. In his *Homily on the Nativity,* Ephrem declares first regarding Mary, "From her the luminous One has shone forth and dispelled the darkness of paganism." He continues, "Therefore, this day resembles the first day of creation."[42]

Tryggve Kronholm observes that Ephrem fought against the Bardaisanite and Manichean conception of darkness as a self-dependent entity. Therefore, Ephrem sees a close connection between the creation of light in the beginning as a victory over darkness and Christ's victory over the darkness spread over the world by Satan.[43]

Related to the theme of light are the ideas of truth and knowledge. Ephrem declares that knowledge of Christ drives away error from humanity, which had become lost. Christ, on the other hand, leads astray and confounds the Evil One.[44] In the *Hymn on the Nativity, No. 22,* Ephrem explains:

> Sin spread its wings to cover everything
> so that no one could see the truth from above it.
> Truth came down to the womb, emerged [and] rolled away error.
> . . . .
>
> Sin has spread her nets for the catch.
> Praise to Your birth that ripped up nets of error.
> The soul that had been captured in the depth flew out to the height.[45]

In his *Hymn on the Resurrection, No. 1,* Ephrem contrasts the revelation of Christ versus the condition of living in error:

> Knowledge of Him chased error away
> from mankind who had become lost;

42. Brock, *Harp,* 66.
43. Kronholm, *Motifs,* 42.
44. Brock, *Harp,* 27–29.
45. Ephrem, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns,* trans. McVey, 182, 4.

the Evil one was led astray by Him and was confounded.
Knowledge of Him poured out all kinds of wisdom upon the
nations.[46]



In the Maronite liturgy, the opening prayer for the feast of Epiphany petitions: "O Christ our Lord, at your baptism in the Jordan River, you manifested yourself to us and dissipated the darkness which surrounded us for ages.... May your Holy Spirit now hover over us, fill us with the brightness of your knowledge, and remove the darkness of ignorance that overshadows us." A *qolo* for Thursdays in Pentecost chants: "Christ our Savior is the light conquering the dark of night. He dispelled the darkness, caused by sin and death, with his Gospel's light." The morning office for Good Friday proclaims: "Eternal incomprehensible Light who has been clouded voluntarily on the Cross so that the light of his kingdom would illumine all creatures from the beacon of the cross; Lord, illumine us and give us joy by the sight of the glorious light and by the manifestation of your astonishing appearance."[47] The hymn of light for the morning office prays: "The light of the just and the joy of righteous hearts is Christ Jesus Our Lord who has manifested himself to us from the bosom of the Father. He has come to deliver us from darkness and he has illumined us by his admirable light.... His glory shines on the world and brightens the depths of the abyss. He annihilates death, puts darkness to flight, having broken the gates of *sheol.* Creatures placed in darkness from former times have adorned themselves with light; the dead who lie in the earth have stood erect again, they chant for they have a Savior." The *qolo* for the Sunday of the Blind One chants: "Christ, light from light, dawned from heaven and walked on earth. He brought the world light and freed it from ignorance."

46. Brock, *Harp,* 27.
47. Khalifé-Hachem, "Office maronite," 284.

Related to the theme of truth and knowledge is the idea of remembrance. Ephrem in his *Hymns on Virginity* speaks about the "Remembrance which routed forgetfulness from creation!" Christ is God's remembrance of his suffering children, but also the restoration of man's power to remember God effectively and enter into life-giving relationship with him.[48]

Freedom from Exile and Bondage

A prominent biblical image of redemption is freedom from exile or bondage. Ephrem in his *Hymn on the Nativity, No. 26* describes freedom as having been enslaved and suggests that Christ came as a slave to liberate freedom. He even suffered being stricken on the face by servants, so that "He broke the yoke upon the free."[49]



> The prayer after the Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving in the *Anaphora of the Twelve Apostles* tells us that Christ "delivered us from exile, and saved us by his divine plan." The Night Prayer of the Maronite office says: "O Sunday, you are the day when the holy Church which was sad has rejoiced; when the Son of the King has liberated her from captivity and signed her with his blood."

In his *Hymns on Virginity* Ephrem sees the redemption of Christ as applying directly to the Gentiles. He says that "Grace has become a hyssop and purified the Gentiles in his mercy." Christ is the rock on which the "building of the Gentiles" was established. He is the "grape" that produced the medicine of life. Robert Murray explains that the reference to the "rock" refers to the rock spoken of in the parable at the end of the Sermon on the Mount.[50]

48. Murray, "Hymn of St. Ephrem," 41, 46.
49. Ephrem, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns,* trans. McVey, 208.
50. Murray, "Hymn of St. Ephrem," 41–42.

A frequent image used by Syriac writers is the biblical image of Christ as the redeeming shepherd. Ephrem describes Christ flying down in search of Adam, the sheep that had strayed. He finds him and carries him back.[51] In the *Nisibene Hymn, No. 52,* Ephrem describes Christ as the Son of the Shepherd of all "who has saved his flock from hidden wolves, the Evil One and Death, who had swallowed it up."[52]



In the liturgy, the Syriac *Anaphora of Peter III* prays to: "The Good Shepherd who [have] given up your life for your flock and [have] delivered it from destroying wolves. Merciful Lord who from the cross hurled a cry and regathered us from being led astray." The morning office for Easter Wednesday develops the theme further. In the *sedro* it prays: "O Christ, you have entered the sheepfold by the door, that is, by your incarnation, so you entered into your resurrection by the door that was your cross, and into life by the door that was your death, for you are the door, the resurrection and the life. Those who enter by you are saved; they shall enter and rise with the liberty of children and shall find in you abundant pasture."

Meditating on the scriptures, the Syriac writers see Christ not only as the shepherd but also as the Passover lamb. For Ephrem Christ as Lamb brings about a double exodus — of the Gentiles from error and of the dead from *sheol.* In the *Hymn on the Unleavened Bread, No. 3,* he explains that with the "true lamb" there took place an exodus from error. With the "living lamb" there was a further exodus of the dead from *sheol,* as from Egypt. With the original Passover lamb, Egypt was forced to surrender against its custom, so with the living lamb, *sheol* had to give back the dead against its nature. With the "cry which he

51. Brock, *Harp,* 27ff.
52. Ibid., 72.

uttered" the true lamb "has trodden out a path from the grave for those who lie buried."[53]

Ephrem on more than one occasion summarizes the work of redemption. He observes that the annual feast of the resurrection should be an opportunity for rejoicing and for good works. In his *Hymn on the Resurrection, No. 2,* Ephrem declares:

> Let the chief pastor [the bishop] weave together his homilies like flowers
> let the priests make a garland of their ministry, the deacons of their reading,
> strong young men of their jubilant shouts, children of their psalms,
> chaste women of their songs, chief citizens of their benefactions,
> ordinary folk of their manner of life.
> Blessed is He who gave us so many opportunities for good![54]

53. Brock, "The Poetic Artistry of St. Ephrem: An Analysis of H. Azym. III," *Parole de l'Orient* 6–7 (1975–76): 23–24.

54. Ephrem, *Ephrem the Syrian: Select Poems,* trans. Brock and Kiraz, 177.

6

DIVINIZATION AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

The process of divinization is rooted in the nature of creation and manifested in revelation and reaches its fullness in the incarnation and redemption. The divinization of humans is the result of the work of redemption, and the active principle of divinization is the Holy Spirit. In the Syriac mind all acts of power and sanctification are the work of the Spirit of God. This is especially highlighted in the *epiklesis* (invoking the Holy Spirit), which is an essential element of the divine liturgy and the mysteries. While the Syriac writers reflect the New Testament references to the indwelling of all three Persons of the Trinity, the focus of attention for the work of divinization is the Holy Spirit.

Ephrem teaches that the purpose of the incarnation is the divinization of humans. In the *Hymn on Virignity, No. 46,* he says:

> Liberty persuaded Adam to scorn his honor
> when he wished to become god while he was a creature.
> Grace purifies sin.

God came, made himself man to save humanity from perdition.
Behold the Son who purified the sin of the servant
and made him divine as he desired.[1]

Ephrem uses vivid imagery to express how Christ through his incarnation and Spirit brings about divinization. In his *Hymn on the Faith, No. 10,* he exclaims:

When the Lord came down to earth, to mortals,
a new creation he created them, like to the Watchers [the angels].
He mingled fire and spirit in them,
to make them fire and spirit within.[2]

For the word "mingled" in the above passage Ephrem uses the Syriac term *mzag,* which is Ephrem's term to describe both the union of natures in Christ and our union with him by grace and the mysteries [sacraments].[3]

In his *Hymn on the Faith, No. 18,* Ephrem uses the image of the wind and a sail with different meanings. The wind refers to the Spirit and to divinity, while the sail refers to the body of Christ in the womb of Mary and to the altar linen as a sign of the Eucharist. The thrust of the verse is to describe the sanctification of humans. Ephrem says:

O sail, pure womb, symbol of the Body of our Redeemer!
although filled with the wind, it by no means confines it;
through the "wind" dwelling in the "sail" live the bodies
wherein dwells the soul.[4]

The means of sanctification after the work of Christ are the mysteries. As already indicated, the Syriac fathers stress the presence of the Spirit in the mysteries as the divinizing force. In

1. Saber, *Théologie baptismale,* 121.
2. Murray, "Hymn of St. Ephrem," 143.
3. Ibid., 147.
4. Yousif, "St. Ephrem on Symbols in Nature: Faith, the Trinity and the Cross (*Hymn on the Faith, No. 18*)," *Eastern Churches Review* 10 (1978): 54, 58–59.

his *Hymn on the Faith, No. 10,* Ephrem establishes the role of the Spirit when he declares:

> Fire and the Spirit are in the womb of her who bore You,
> Fire and the Spirit are in the river in which you were baptized,
> Fire and the Spirit are in our baptism,
> and in the Bread and the Cup is Fire and the Holy Spirit.[5]

In the same hymn Ephrem works on the image of fire to express the sanctification of humans. He notes that fire could represent the wrath of God that descended and consumed sinners. On the other hand, the fire of mercy descends and dwells in the bread. By consuming the fire in the bread we receive life.[6] In another hymn Ephrem further elaborates that the "power of the Spirit who makes his place in the bread enters to repose in us."[7]



> In the Maronite liturgy, the prayer after the *epiklesis* of the *Anaphora of St. Cyril of Jerusalem* prays: "May the Holy Spirit purify and sanctify us. May we share in His divinity and become sharers with Him in the kingdom."

The Syriac fathers speak in intimate terms of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the soul. Aphrahat in his *Demonstration No. 6* warns that when the Holy Spirit departs from a spirit, Satan draws near and tries to cause him to sin so that the Holy Spirit might leave altogether. He cautions that when the ascetic is not fervent in the Spirit and his heart is inclining to the thoughts of this world, he knows that the Spirit is not with him. He should then pray and keep vigil that the Spirit of God might come to him. Aphrahat then adds:

5. Brock, *Harp,* 16.
6. Murray, "Hymn of St. Ephrem," 143–44.
7. François Graffin, "L'eucharistie chez Saint Ephrem," *Parole de l'Orient* 4 (1973): 100–5.

> They then that receive the Spirit of Christ, come into the likeness
> of the heavenly Adam, Who is our Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ.
> For the animal shall be swallowed up in the spiritual, as I wrote unto thee above.
> And the man that grieves the Spirit of Christ, will be animal in the resurrection;
> because the heavenly spirit is not within him, that the animal might be swallowed
> up in it.[8]

When Ephrem does speak of all three persons of the Trinity, he relates their activity to a tripartite view of humans—namely, that they are spirit, soul, and body. In his *Hymn on the Faith, No. 8,* he explains:

> The three Names are sown in three ways,
> in the spirit, the soul and the body, mysteriously.
> When this trinity within us is perfected by the Three
> it dominates even the sword!
> If the spirit suffers, it is entirely imprinted by the Father;
> if the soul suffers, it is wholly mingled with the Son;
> and if the body is burnt in martyrdom,
> then its communion with the Holy Spirit is complete.[9]

Robert Murray and other writers observe that early Syriac writers understood the Holy Spirit in feminine terms. For Murray the biblical roots of this idea may be the use of bird imagery, especially when one considers that the Semitic verbal root "*rhp*" used in speaking of the Spirit also has the meaning of a mother bird hovering. For example, Genesis 1:2 speaks of the spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters. This Old Testament image may be reflected in the Spirit as a dove over the waters

8. Aphraat, *Select Demonstrations,* trans. Johnston, in Schaff and Wace, *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* 13:373–74.

9. Yousif, "Symbolisme christologique," 53.

of the baptism of Jesus. Aphrahat tells us that we should adore God as Father and the Holy Spirit as mother. For Murray this may be simply attributing to the Holy Spirit the motherly character that the later parts of Isaiah (49:14–15; 66:13) find in God. While Ephrem conjugates the word for spirit as feminine, he seems only once to refer to actual femininity.[10]

10. Murray, *Symbols,* 313–19.

7

THE CHURCH

The church is primarily the vehicle whereby new members of Christ are formed. It is the source of the mysteries [sacraments] through which sanctification occurs. Early Syriac thought still awaiting an imminent "*parousia*" did not concern itself with the structural make-up of the church, and it is only when serious threats of heresy began to develop in the fourth century on that questions of the unity and cohesiveness of the church became important. A prominent theme in Syriac writings is that God has rejected the chosen people of the Old Testament in favor of the "church of the Nations." This new church is betrothed by Christ at his baptism in the Jordan and is wedded to Christ on the cross. The blood and water from the side of Christ represent the mysteries of "initiation" by which members of the church are incorporated and nourished.

One limitation on Ephrem's ecclesiology is the fact that he probably did not have firsthand knowledge of all the books of the New Testament. He was familiar with the *Diatesseron,* Acts, St. Paul's epistles, and the apocryphal Third Corinthians.[1] The probability that he did not know 1 Peter could have hindered the development of a full ecclesiology. Also, the Syriac church

1. Murray, "St. Ephrem the Syrian on Church Unity," *Eastern Churches Quarterly* 15 (1963): 168.

received the Book of Revelation at a comparatively late date. Robert Murray believes that even the Syriac reference to a heavenly Jerusalem is an allusion to Galatians 4:26.[2]

For Ephrem the church is first a local Christian community, such as the church of Nisibis or of Edessa. In addition, the church is the great Christian community instituted by Christ in place of the synagogue. It is the refound paradise, the Body of Christ, and his holy and immaculate spouse.[3]

On the other hand, it is possible that the strong ascetical spirit of the early Syriac church with its corresponding eschatological expectation could have diminished the role of the church in the world in their thinking. For Aphrahat, Ephrem, and the *Liber Graduum,* the "kingdom" is almost an exclusively eschatological conception, not yet realized.[4]

The image of church as mother, rare in earlier documents, is developed by Ephrem in the sense that both Mary and the church are seen as the second Eve. Only the *Liber Graduum* makes much of the church as mother.[5]

The predominant theme of the fourth-century fathers is that the chosen people have been replaced by a "new people," the "nation from the nations," the church of the Gentiles. For Aphrahat the significance of Abraham is that God promised to extend salvation through him to all nations. The faith of Abraham reveals that in the future any person of any nation can be saved. As an instrument of this plan of universal salvation, God chose one people for his own, but all its rites were types seeking fulfillment in the church. Ephrem in his *Hymn on the Unleavened Bread, No. 5,* says, "The type was in Egypt, the reality in the church; the sealing of the reward [will be] in the kingdom." For Aphrahat the church is the new circumcision, new Passover, new covenant, but especially a new spirit, a spirit of freedom.[6]

2. Murray, *Symbols,* 20–21.
3. Saber, *Théologie baptismale,* 51.
4. Murray, *Symbols,* 346.
5. Ibid., 157.
6. Ibid., 41–61.



This theme is reflected in the Maronite liturgy. The "*anamnesis*" of the *Anaphora of St. Cyril of Jerusalem* prays: "Let the light of your face shine upon us, the church which you chose from among the nations." The "prayer of forgiveness" of the Dedication of the Church Sunday declares: "He summons distant peoples to her and He collects the scattered nations into her." The Maronite liturgy in the opening prayer of The Renewal of the Church Sunday prays: "In your love for all people you betrothed the church of all nations, and in your grace you established its foundation on Peter and the twelve apostles." A *qolo* for the morning office of Fridays makes the point: "Your church, which you chose as your spouse from the beginning, implores you in tears through the voice of her friends." The *mazmooro* verse declares: "Lord, your church, betrothed to you from the beginning of time petitions you." A *qolo* for the Sunday of the Resurrection chants: ". . . Come forth, O Daughter of the nations, come forth! Through the mouths of your children, sing praise to the hidden Father, who, in his love, betrothed you to his only Son." An ancient Maronite hymn for the feast of the Sanctification of the Church prays: "Blessed are you, O believing church betrothed of the heavenly Spouse. The mysteries, symbols, and figures of all the visionaries were accomplished in you."

THE BODY OF CHRIST

Ephrem sets up an implicit basis for the church when he teaches that the same body of Christ that healed us and rose again has been given to us in sacramental form to heal us, incorporate us in him in the church, and give us a pledge of the resurrection.[7] In his *Commentary on the Diatesseron* Ephrem explains:

If then the church is his body, as Paul his witness said, believe that his church has passed through all this without corruption. Just as by the

7. Ibid., 69–72.

condemnation of the one Adam all bodies died and must die, so by the victory of this one body of Christ, the whole church found life and lives. But just as, because the bodies that themselves have sinned, themselves must also die, and the earth their mother was cursed, so because of this body, because it is itself the church, which is not corrupted, its earth was blessed from the beginning. For the earth is the body of Mary, the temple that received the seed.[8]

Ephrem's use of the Gospel images of Christ as a vine or as a vineyard serve to amplify the idea that the church is the body of Christ. This is expressed in such images as Christ as the vineyard and Christians vines in him; as Christ as the branch of the vine and Christians as fruits hanging on him; and as Christ as vine or especially as olive; he is the "tree of life," source of sacramental grace for the church.[9]

Nevertheless, Robert Murray concludes that fourth-century Syriac literature did not develop much the ideas of corporate personality and mystical Body. Neither Aphrahat nor Ephrem seem to start from St. Paul. They seem to center mainly on the personal body of Christ.[10]

Jacob of Serugh uses the Syriac term "to mix" to describe the union between Christ and the church. He uses the same idea to describe the relationship between Christ and the bread and wine of the Eucharist. He declares that Christ, the rich bridegroom, and the church, the poor bride, are made one. Jacob says that Christ came to "take the church and mix it with his body and make it from him, and the two of them would be one, . . . the groom from the virgin and the bride from baptism." Roberta Chesnut concludes that it is unclear whether the church comes to belong to Jesus as an extension of his own body or whether they are to be "one" in the way in which any husband and wife are one.[11]

8. Ibid., 83–84.
9. Ibid., 113, 129–30.
10. Ibid., 93–94.
11. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies,* 134.

BETROTHED IN THE JORDAN AND FROM THE SIDE OF CHRIST

The Syriac mind views the church itself in sacramental terms. The church is not only the source of the mysteries, but is a sacrament of the union of Christ with his people. As already stated, the origins of the church are traced to the baptism of Christ and his death on the cross. The baptism of Christ in the Jordan is a key event that was foreshadowed in the Old Testament with events that took place at the well. In his *Hymn on the Ephiphany, No. 7,* Ephrem explains, "At the well Rebecca received jewels in her ears and hands. The Spouse of Christ put on treasures in the midst of the waters: on her hands the living Body, and in her ears the promises."[12]

In his *Commentary on the Diatesseron* Ephrem cites various betrothals that took place at the well, such as Eleazer (for Isaac) with Rebecca, Jacob with Rachel, and Moses with Zipporah: "All these were types of Our Lord who espoused his Church at this baptism in the Jordan."[13]

In *Hymn on the Epiphany, No. 14,* Ephrem meditates on Jesus' reflecting on his baptism at the Jordan:

> My mind transported me to the Jordan, and I saw a marvel
> when there was revealed that glorious Bridegroom
> had freed the Bride from the servitude of sin and sanctified her.
>
> . . . .
>
> The Bride you betrothed to me awaits me, that I
> should go down to baptize and sanctify her.
>
> . . . .
>
> The waters in my Baptism are sanctified,
> and they shall receive fire and the Spirit from Me.[14]

12. See Cassingena, *Hymnes,* 64.
13. Murray, *Symbols,* 135.
14. Lamy, *Sancti Ephraem,* cols. 113–28.



> The Maronite liturgy celebrates the betrothal of the church by Christ at the Jordan River. In the entrance hymn for the weekdays of Epiphany, it chants: "He [John the Baptist] then told the crowd: 'After me shall come the Groom to betroth the church, his Bride, with waters blest, when he comes to be baptized.'" In the Maronite rite of Baptism, the deacon prays: "The church descended to be baptized and was adorned by baptism. She received the groom who betrothed her as a pledge." A *qolo* chanted during the procession of the newly baptized declares: "I greatly marveled about John and Eleizer. Two servants obtained two brides for their masters. Eleizer, servant of Abraham, arranged the betrothal of Rebecca by the well of Harron, and John arranged the betrothal of the church by the Jordan River." An ancient hymn for the Feast of Epiphany observes: "The clouds gather from everywhere to overshadow the water as a chamber for the glorious Spouse, come to be baptized."[15]

The church soiled by sin was in need of purification, which happened in baptism, which in turn owes its redemptive force to the death of Christ on the cross. The baptism of Christ in the Jordan is the betrothal of the church. After her purification by the heavenly spouse, the church is without stain and beautiful, richly decked out in an inconceivable brightness.[16] The baptism in the Jordan reaches its climax with the salvific death of Christ on the cross. From the side of Christ comes blood and water that effect the birth of the church and her wedding to her heavenly groom. Jacob of Serugh describes Christ as offering his suffering as a dowry for the church, his spouse; Christ is a shepherd who leads his flock by his staff, the cross:

15. Tabet, "Le Beth-Gazo Maronite (1263 A.D.), l'Add. 14.710," *Parole de l'Orient* 26 (2001): 267–302, at 291–92, 294–95.

16. William de Vries, "La conception de l'église chez les Syriens séparés de Rome (Les Syriens du patriarcat d'Antioche)," *L'Orient Syrien* 2 (1957): 113–14.

Yes, the Son of God gave his sufferings by love so to espouse,
by the price of his pains, the abandoned church.
For this adorer of idols, he suffers on the cross,
so that after his sufferings she was all holy to him.
He accepted to lead to pasture all the flock of men,
with the great staff of the crucifixion in suffering.
Nations, worlds, classes, crowds, and peoples,
He accepts to lead all, to have in return only the church.[17]



The Maronite liturgy reflects the theme of the wedding of the church to Christ on the cross in many places. The *etro* [prayer of incense] of the evening office of Easter Thursday says of the church: "Your church, O Christ, who on the cross has come out of the wound from your side, as Eve had come out of the side of Adam in paradise." A *qolo* in the marriage rite chants: "With blood that flowed from his side, he wrote her marriage contract." The Eucharistic aspect is seen in the "prayer of forgiveness" of the evening office of the First Sunday of Lent: "Praise, glory, and honor to the spouse of the church who has united her to him in his blood, delivering to her his holy body." These themes are echoed in the "prayer of forgiveness" of the Consecration of the Church Sunday: "Through the death of the bridegroom she was betrothed. Thus was she crowned with thorns, and through the passion she was redeemed. Adorned with fine robes, she arose in divine glory as a well-appointed palace, a firmly set city, a fortified tower, and a holy mountain."

Both the East and West Syriac liturgies compare the union of Christ with his Church to the marriage union of man and woman. The Maronite ritual on marriage reflects a developed theology of the church. The "prayer of forgive-

17. Graffin, "Recherches sur le thème de l'église-épouse: Dans les liturgies et litterature patristique de langue syriaque," *L'Orient Syrien* 3 (1958): 331; see also Bou Mansour, *Théologie* 1:152–57.

ness" declares: "May we be worthy to raise glory to the heavenly spouse. . . . In his love, He has acquired the "Church of the Nations," and by his cross, has washed and purified her, and made her his glorious spouse. He has invited to his marriage prophets, apostles, and holy martyrs." The *qolo* hymn adds: "Alleluia, there was not in this world and there would never be a Spouse as the one who was acquired by the Christ-Groom. Her beauty surpasses all beauty and the Spouse who has married her is unable to die. From the blood which came from his side, He wrote her dowry."[18]

This theme of the wedding of the church to Christ is found developed in other churches of the Syriac tradition. William de Vries, writing on the tradition of the church of the East, summarizes his findings regarding its ecclesiology as teaching that the heavenly Father has chosen the church from among the nations as a bride for his Son. Christ acquires his betrothed at the price of his sacrificed body and poured blood. The moment of betrothal is sometimes the crucifixion, sometimes the baptism in the Jordan. To be purified the church had to receive the waters of baptism. The redemption primarily through the death on the cross has liberated the church from the bonds of Satan. Among the presents Christ gives his betrothed are his body and blood and the rebirth of baptism.[19]

Robert Murray expands the relationship of the church to Christ on the cross by studying the imagery of the cross as "tree." Therefore, the church is one with Christ as Mystic Vineyard, Vine and Grape, and receives from Christ the oil of initiation, consecration, and healing from him as Mystic Olive.[20]

18. Jeanne-Ghislaine Van Overstraeten, "Les liturgies nuptiales des églises de langue syriaque et le mystère de l'église-épouse," *Parole de l'Orient* 8 (1977–78): 296–99.

19. De Vries, "La conception de l'église chez les Syriens sépares de Rome (Les Syriens du catholicosat de Seleucie-Ctesiphon)," *L'Orient Syrien* 3 (1958): 163–64.

20. Murray, *Symbols,* 342.

THE EUCHARIST AND THE CHURCH

As noted, the body of Christ by which he healed humanity and rose again, he gave us in sacramental form to incorporate us in him in the church.[21] Ephrem in his *Hymn on Paradise, No. 6,* proclaims:

> In the Church he set the Word,
> which causes joy by its promises and fear by its threats.
> The assembly of the saints is a symbol of paradise.
> The fruit of him who gives life to all is picked in her every day.
> In her, my brethren, are pressed the grapes of him
> who is the Medicine of Life.[22]

Sebastian Brock believes the church should be viewed in a twofold aspect: on the one hand, it manifests itself in the sacraments, as baptism and the Eucharist; on the other hand, it represents the totality of its individual members. The church, as the vehicle of the sacraments, is the means of the sanctification of the church as the assembly of individual members.[23]

THE CHURCH AS ROCK

A favorite Syriac theme is that the church is established on faith. Reflecting various biblical images, the church is seen as built on the rock of faith, the church itself a building. According to Aphrahat, Christ the chief shepherd made Simon the chief shepherd in his place. Christ was the *kepha* [rock] foretold by prophecy and type and made Simon the *kepha* in his place. He said that on that *kepha* he would build his church, and the "bars of *sheol*" would be powerless against it. The *kepha* is the foundation of the church and therefore a functional title given by Christ to Simon.

In *Demonstration, No. 1,* Aphrahat explains that the "build-

21. Ibid., 69–70.
22. Ibid., 128–29.
23. Brock, "Mysteries," 469–70.

ing" is the structure of faith laid on the foundation of Christ the firm Rock. "When the whole building has gone up and is finished and perfected, it becomes a house and temple for the indwelling of Christ." Aphrahat applies the figure of rock as foundation to both Christ and Peter. The building on the rock is normally faith, but it is also Peter and sometimes the apostles (James and John are "pillars"). The church is the "One House" and Christians are the temples of the Spirit.[24]

Ephrem's development is similar to that of Aphrahat. Christ is the rock or stone, prefigured by a number of types. The theme of Christ the rock making Simon the rock is often implicit, but rarely explicit as in Aphrahat. Simon's name *kepha* is once again seen as a functional title shared with Christ.[25]



The Maronite liturgy offers a similar interpretation of the Biblical passages. The prayer after the *epiklesis* in the *Anaphora of St. James* petitions for "strength for your holy church which you founded on the rock of faith, so that the power of evil shall not prevail against her." The *mazmoro* verse for the Consecration of the Church Sunday prays: "The Lord built his holy church as a rock of faith. Simon Peter entered and laid the foundations and Paul adorned the building."

THE CHURCH OF TRUTH

As noted, the Syriac fathers in the early centuries had a sacramental view of the church and concentrated on its local structures. As time went on, the church as community was seen as the body of truth, and heresy represented a threat to unity. Ephrem in his *Hymn against Heresies, No. 2,* exclaims:

24. Murray, "The Rock and the House on the Rock," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 30 (1964): 315–24.

25. Ibid., 325–50. Jacob of Serugh holds similar views; see Bou Mansour, *Théologie* 1:147–52.

This is the body of truth, whose words
the foolish and erring have cut up like limbs;
whereas, since it is spiritual
it is found to be whole and entire.
But in the Church of the Truth
it [truth] is perfect, and perfects her.
It is thy joy, O Church, this body of truth
ordered in its members, concordant in its words,
faithful in its promises, crowned in its triumphs.

And in his *Hymn on the Faith, No. 52,* he prays "that from all churches there may be a single Church of Truth."[26]

According to William de Vries, from the first centuries up to the Arab invasion, the concept of "communion" [*sawtofuto*] is in the first rank. Communion is a sacramental-juridical bond that ties the members of the true church of Christ to the exclusion of all others. Ecclesiastical authority is the judge of who belongs to this communion, of which the conclusive sign is the Eucharistic celebration. Since heretics were excluded, the preliminary requirement of communion is true faith. True faith is general accord with the bishops and faithful, and when this accord is dubious, is the teaching of the fathers of the primitive church and of the apostles and scripture.[27]

In regard to the authority in the church, the Syriac fathers speak about Christ sharing his functions with humans. According to Robert Murray, the apostolic ministry shares in Christ's function as head of the Body, as spouse of the Bride, as priest and keybearer, shepherd, steward, farmer, physician. Christ's work as witness, healer, guide, and helper continues in the sacramental society of the church, though only by "under-shepherds" and "under-stewards," who must always remember that they have an account to render.[28]

26. Cited by Murray, "St. Ephrem the Syrian," 168, 175.
27. De Vries, "Conception de l'église (Syriens du patriarchat d'Antioche), 116–24.
28. Murray, *Symbols,* 158, 204.

8

MARY

The Syriac writers claimed that Christ throughout his life on earth was also continually the divine presence, possessing the power of creation and annihilation and the healing power of redemption. In their minds the mother who conceived and bore him would be intimately affected and divinized by that power. However, Mary was also very much a human possessed of free will. Through her virginity and free assent to the will of the Father she takes away the shame of her own ancient mother, Eve, and in so doing becomes the first member of the church. It was natural for Syriac writers to see Mary as the fulfillment of Old Testament types and a symbol of the future church.

Jacob of Serugh celebrates Mary's purity as a fitting dwelling for the presence of God. In his metric homilies he declares, "God sees her, He sees the purity and transparence of her soul and he wishes to make his dwelling in that which has been purified from all sin."[1]

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND MARY

In the mind of Ephrem the Holy Spirit is the principle of divinization. The "*epiklesis*" of the Spirit not only occurred in the

1. Brock, "Marie dans la tradition syriaque," *Lettre de Ligugé* 189 (1978): 6.

baptism of Christ in the Jordan, but also continues in the mysteries of baptism and the Eucharist. However, the same action of the Spirit took place in the womb of Mary, as noted in the chapter on divinization. In the *Hymn on the Faith, No. 10,* he declares:

> In the womb that bore you are Fire and the Spirit,
> Fire and Spirit are in the river where you were baptized,
> Fire and Spirit are in our Baptism too,
> And in the Bread and the Cup are Fire and Spirit.

Moses Bar Kepha (d. 903), in his commentary on the liturgy, notes the significance by saying that just as the Holy Spirit descended on the womb of Mary and made a body for God the Word from the flesh of the virgin, so the Spirit descends on the bread and wine on the altar and makes them into the body and blood of God the Word that originated from the virgin.[2]

Sebastian Brock dwells on the meaning of this parallelism between the annunciation and the Eucharist. For him the "*epiklesis*" of the Holy Spirit effects a new relationship of the created world to the creator. The bread and wine that represent both "fruit of the earth" and "the work of human hands" are transformed into the saving body and blood of Christ. This perhaps indicates how the Holy Spirit can transform the material world into sacrament.[3]

Brock also explains that, according to an ancient myth, it was when lightning struck the pearl oyster in the sea that pearls were created—the result of two disparate elements, fire and water. In his *Hymns on the Faith, Nos. 81–85,* Ephrem meditates on the mystery of the birth of Christ the pearl as a result of the coming of the fire of the Holy Spirit upon the "watery tomb" of Mary.[4]

In the first *Hymn on the Pearl,* Ephrem declares, "It is again

2. Brock, "Mary and the Eucharist," 51.
3. Ibid., 53.
4. Ibid., 56.

Mary that I discern and her pure conception. The church also and the Son in her womb as the cloud that carried him: symbol of heaven and where his resplendent light radiates."[5]

Besides the sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit, Ephrem believed that it was the presence of the Word in Mary's womb that sanctified her. In his *Hymn on the Church, No. 36,* Ephrem meditates on the effects of the presence of Christ the Light had on his mother Mary:

As though on an eye the Light settled in Mary,
It polished her mind, made bright her thought
and pure her understanding, causing her
virginity to shine.
. . . .

As the Daystar in the river,
the Bright One in the tomb,
he shone forth on the mountain top
and gave brightness too in the womb;
he dazzled as he went up from the river,
gave illumination at his ascension.
The brightness which Moses put on
was wrapped on him from without,
whereas the river in which Christ was baptized
put on Light from within,
and so did Mary's body, in which he resided,
gleam from within.
Just as Moses gleamed with divine glory
because he saw the splendor briefly,
how much more should the body wherein Christ resided gleam,
and the river where he was baptized?[6]

As developed in chapter 3, for Ephrem and the Syriac fathers creation itself prepares progressively for the coming of

5. Graffin, "Les hymnes sur la perle de Saint Ephrem," *L'Orient Syrien* 12 (1967): 133.

6. Brock, "St. Ephrem on Christ," 138.

Christ through symbol and image. In this view Mary occupies the climactic role of creation. We repeat a citation from his *Hymn on Virginity, No. 5:*

> Creation traced the symbols of Christ; Mary fashioned his limbs;
> it was many wombs that engendered the only-begotten Son—
> for his mother's womb gave birth to his humanity,
> while creation gave symbolic birth to him.[7]

MARY AND EVE

The Syriac fathers in meditating on Mary focus on the central event of the annunciation. An advanced theology of Mary is achieved by contrasting the effect of sin brought about by Eve's failure and the redemption achieved through the free cooperation of Mary. This theme is seen in the metric homilies of Jacob of Serugh when he declares, "From the silence of Eve came defeat and dishonor; from the words of Mary, Life, Light and victory."[8]

Ephrem in his *Commentary on the Diatesseron* uses multiple images to show that the sin that occurred in paradise is overcome by Mary at the annunciation and by her son on the cross: "Death entered by the ear of Eve; therefore life entered by the ear of Mary. By the wood of the tree man came to be a debtor; therefore when the Lord came he paid the debt by the wood of the Cross."[9]

Ephrem further relates Mary to the "robe of glory," the image of sanctification that Adam and Eve lost. In his *Hymn on the Nativity, No. 17,* he explains, "In her virginity leaves of shame did Eve put on; your Mother put on in her virginity a robe of

7. Brock, *Harp,* 13.

8. Brock, "Marie dans la tradition," 6.

9. Murray, "Mary, the Second Eve in the Early Syriac Fathers," *Eastern Churches Review* 3 (1970–71): 374.

glory, sufficient for all. 'A little cloak, the body, I gave to the clothier of all.'"[10]

Jacob of Serugh in his metric homilies expands on these themes of Ephrem. He adds the idea that Mary undoes the harm incurred by her aged mother, Eve. He explains:

> The second Eve has given birth to Life, among mortals;
> She has removed the debt contracted by Eve, her mother.
> The young daughter [Mary] has given her hand
> and brought help to her aged mother [Eve] buried in the earth;
> She has raised her from the fall caused by the Serpent.
> This was the daughter [Mary] who wove the robe of glory
> and gave it to her father [Adam] who covered his body
> which had remained naked since the Tree of the temptation.[11]



> These themes of Jacob are repeated in a Maronite hymn to Mary found in a manuscript dating from the 12th to 13th century which declares: "Through the announcement brought by the serpent, the virgin-offspring issued from Adam introduced death to all generations; and the pure Virgin Mary, through the announcement brought by the angel, introduced new life in the world. The former divested herself of her glory of Eden; Mary embroidered a vestment of glory and gave it to her to cover her nakedness. . . . She is the new Eve who has given life among the dead. And she has raised again the first Adam from his fall to paradise."[12]

The Syriac tradition describes the state of sin in the world as darkness. Light is not only the image of God but the instrument of victory over sin. Ephrem in contrasting Eve and Mary also develops imagery regarding darkness and light. In the *Hymn on the Church, No. 37,* he says:

10. Ibid., 376.
11. Brock, "Marie dans la tradition," 11.
12. Tabet, "Chants pour la mère de Dieu dans l'add. 14.703 (XII–XIII s.) Beth Gazo Maronite," *Parole de l'Orient* 29 (2004): 138.

The world, you see, has two eyes fixed in it;
Eve was its left, blind eye,
while the right eye, bright, is Mary.
Through the eye that was darkened the whole world was darkened,
and men groped and thought that every stone
that they stumbled upon was a god, calling falsehood truth.
But when the world was illumined by that other eye
and the heavenly Light that resided in its midst,
men became reconciled once again with God,
realizing that what they stumbled on was destroying their very life.[13]

Ephrem expands this contrast between Eve and Mary and applies it to the Eucharist. In his *Hymn on the Unleavened Bread, No. 6,* he declares, "Mary has given us the Bread of rest in place of the bread of toil that Eve provided."[14]

Besides the contrasts already mentioned, other parallels are that while Eve was wounded by the serpent, Mary and her son defeated him. As Eve was the mother that brought death unto her children, Mary is the second life-giving mother of humanity, and her offspring, "the medicine of life," is the antidote to the "drug of death" through which Eve was poisoned.[15]

The Syriac writers contrast Mary not only with Eve, but also with other facets of the original paradise, including Adam, the tree, and the earth itself. In his *Hymn on the Nativity, No. 1,* Ephrem speaks about the "virgin earth" that gave birth to Adam who was "lord of the earth"; at the nativity, another virgin gives birth to the "Adam who is the Lord of heaven."[16] Ephrem expands this theme by incorporating it into the Pauline reference to death coming through the first Adam. As cited previously in his *Commentary on the Diatesseron,* he observes:

13. Brock, "Poet," 248.
14. Brock, "Mary and the Eucharist," 57.
15. Kronholm, *Motifs,* 105–6.
16. Brock, "Marie dans la tradition," 9.

But just as because the bodies which themselves have sinned, themselves must also die, and the earth their mother was cursed, so because this body, because it itself is the Church, which is not corrupted, the earth was blessed from the beginning. For the earth is the body of Mary, the temple which received the seed.[17]

Jacob of Serugh finds direct parallels between Adam and Mary, especially by contrasting the origin of Eve with the virginal conception of Mary. In his metric homilies he explains that just as Adam gave birth to Eve without sexual relations, so Mary gave birth in similar fashion. The Spirit breathed on the face of Adam and he gave birth to Eve, so the same Spirit was received by Mary and she gave birth to her son. In Adam's giving birth to the "mother of all the living" the birth of Christ, the source of all life is prefigured.[18]

Jacob of Serugh goes further and attributes an active role to Mary in the work of redemption:

Thanks to Mary, the road toward Eden
which had been closed was able to be trod upon anew;
the serpent has fled and humans are able to go to God,
thanks to Mary, the cherubim has turned away his sword,
renouncing the guarding of the Tree of Life
[Christ] who henceforth is given as nourishment.[19]



The Maronite liturgy in the evening office for Mary proclaims: "You resemble, Mary, the paradise where was planted the tree of life, you from whom appeared the Creator and giver of life. Paradise however has given to humanity the fruit of sin which corrupted the human race in its root, but, you have given the blessed fruit who has saved the whole human race, and has given it the life of grace."

17. Murray, "Mary, the Second Eve," 380.
18. Brock, "Marie dans la tradition," 9–10.
19. Ibid., 12.

OTHER TYPES AND SYMBOLS OF MARY

The Syriac writers employed various images in trying to comprehend the meaning of Mary's role. In the *Hymn on Mary, No. 7,* attributed to Ephrem, Mary is described as a ship who bears the "great steersman of creation" who brought peace to heaven and earth.[20] In a *Homily on the Nativity* also attributed to Ephrem, Mary is compared to the "burning bush." He declares that it is amazing how the womb of Mary was able to carry "flaming fire" and not be burned. It must be compared to the bush on Horeb, which "bore God in the flame."[21] Mary is a palace where the King of kings had dwelt and the new heaven where he dwells. The Lord was formed and clothed in her features, although by his nature he bore no resemblance to her.[22] Sebastian Brock observes that the Syriac writers saw many biblical types of Mary, and the great majority of them, such as ark, burning bush, temple, all have in common the fact that they contained or carried something holier than themselves.[23]

MARY'S RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST

Ephrem further develops Mary's role in salvation by meditating on the various ways that Mary is related to Christ. In his *Hymn on the Nativity, No. 16,* he has her speaking:

> How shall I call you, O stranger to us, Who became one of us?
> Shall I call you "Son"? Shall I call you "Brother"?
> Shall I call you "Bridegroom"? Shall I call you "Lord"?

20. Brock, *Harp,* 59.

21. Ibid., 62.

22. Ibid., 66. Jacob of Serugh echoes the image of Mary as a "well": "Mary is the 'new well' whence flowed the living waters; though unpierced she gave birth to abundant streams for the thirsty world." Brock, "Mysteries," 470.

23. Brock, *Harp,* 34; Brock, "Marie dans la tradition," 9.

Begetter of his mother by a second birth from out of the waters!
For I am your sister of the house of David who is our second father;
and yet I am your mother because of your conception;
and I am [your] Bride because of your chastity:
Handmaid and daughter by blood and water,
for you have bought and baptized [me].
The Son of the Most High came to dwell in me and I became his mother,
And as I bore him, by another birth he in turn bore me, by a second birth.
The robe of his mother that he put on, his body, I have put on its glory![24]

24. Murray, "Mary, the Second Eve," 376.

9

MYSTERIES OF INITIATION

BAPTISM AND CHRISMATION

The incarnation and redemption of Christ represent the fulfillment of creation and the realization of the shadows and types of the Old Testament. However, Christ not only brings the completion of salvation but the reality of the divinization of creatures, primarily through the action of the Spirit. The events of Christ's baptism in the Jordan and his death on the cross were not meant to be discrete moments in time, but to manifest a power that will extend through time. The waters blessed by the baptism of Christ and the blood and water that poured from the side of Christ are gifts to his bride the church and her children through history. While the types have been fulfilled, the new "mysteries" have been established with divinizing power by the symbolic actions of Christ. Ephrem saw in the Old Testament the establishment of a tradition that continues on in the engendering of the sacraments as a natural prolongation of the economy of salvation in history. In his mind the work of divinization and salvation continues as an extension of the Body of Christ.

The central mystery is the Eucharist, which is both the cause and sign of church community. In fact, the assembly partaking of the Eucharist is the essential core of what church is. However, it is only those who have been delivered by the divinizing power of Christ's Spirit in the waters of baptism and the anointing of chrism who are in a position to partake of the Eucharist. According to Paul Verghese, the Eucharist is the raison d'être of the body of Christ in the world of space and time. All "mysteries" are completed in the Eucharist.[1] The mysteries of baptism, chrismation, and Eucharist are integral elements in the process of divinization.

Before discussing the mysteries individually, some further observations should be made regarding the meaning of "mystery" itself in the Syriac tradition. As developed in the chapter on revelation, the Syriac term for mystery is *raza,* and in the fourth century it had various applications. It was used for any religious symbol (especially Old Testament "types"), for sacramental rites, and in the plural for the Eucharist.[2]

Verghese explains that the term *raza* in Syriac comes from the root *raz,* meaning "to conspire," and might possibly have had its origin in the mystery cults. But in ecclesiastical Syria it came to have a special meaning of an act of the chosen community, instructing the baptized or performing the great mystery of the upper room. A mystery can thus show forth some event of eternal significance. Also, the "mystery" is a corporate act of a specific body and is closed to those outside it. It is, so to speak, a reality of the eternal order, manifesting itself in time through a visible corporate action of the church to those already initiated into the mystery and living by it.[3]

William de Vries adds that the idea of mystery conveys the

1. Paul Verghese, "The Relation between Baptism, 'Confirmation,' and the Eucharist in the Syrian Orthodox Church," *Studia Liturgica* 4 (1965): 84.

2. Murray, *Symbols,* 21.

3. Verghese, "Relation," 82–83.

meaning of "mysterious symbols" of a superior world, which are able to introduce us in an efficacious way to that world. It is especially clear that baptism, chrism, and the Eucharist are made up of matter informed by spirit. The fathers describe the action of the Spirit as "hovering" or "brooding" over the matter. The divine is thereby concretized and incorporated in visible matter. For example, Moses Bar Kepha draws a parallel between the Eucharist and chrism: "We understand and we conceive with the eyes of the soul God the Word who unites himself with bread and wine and with the oil of chrism."[4] In the Syriac liturgical tradition the water of baptism, the bread and wine of the Eucharist, and chrism are all three consecrated by an *epiklesis.* They become "dynamized" matter.

Joseph Lécuyer sees this view of mystery reflected in the liturgy. He explains that at the beginning of the anaphora, the faithful are to believe that, beyond sensible appearances and the terrestrial signs of the liturgy, there is an invisible and celestial reality that is being accomplished. Every mystery is the indication in signs and symbols of invisible and ineffable things. For John Chrysostom, if the Eucharist is a sacrifice that is accomplished on earth, the reality that it contains is all celestial. "To assist at the sacrifice is to assist at a celestial spectacle." Our altar is a celestial table, which receives gifts of the earth and on which is operated an admirable exchange between earth and heaven; it has a double presence "fixed on the earth, it is near the celestial throne."[5]

BAPTISM

The Syriac church considers the baptism of Christ to be the central event that established the mystery of baptism. Through

4. De Vries, "Théologie des sacraments chez les Syriens monophysites," *L'Orient Syrien* 8 (1963): 264–65.

5. Joseph Lécuyer, "La théologie de l'anaphore selon les pères de l'école d'Antioche," *L'Orient Syrien* 6 (1961): 389–96.

baptism in the Jordan River, Christ consecrated all the rivers of the world. The fulfillment of Christ's baptismal action takes place on the cross, when blood and water flow from the side of Christ. However, the earliest tradition did not stress the idea of "dying and rising" concerning baptism, but rather baptism as a new womb giving birth to new children bearing the image of the New Adam and being vested again in the "robe of glory." Baptism reverses the sad events of paradise.

THE BAPTISM IN THE JORDAN

Speaking about the Syriac tradition, Sebastian Brock says that the baptism of Christ was the source of Christian baptism. At his baptism there is the public proclamation of his Sonship (Mark 1:11). Even in the New Testament it seems that Christ's baptism was regarded as "anointing" (Acts 10:38; see Lk 4:18), and the choice of Psalm 2:7 provided a basis for Jesus' baptism as his public anointing as Messiah-king.[6]

Ephrem views the baptism of Christ in the water as analogous to the divine presence in the womb of Mary and therefore as the means for divinization. Also, using Moses as an example, he claims that just as God in his mercy limited himself in coming to Moses, he does the same for feeble human beings. In his *Hymn on Epiphany, No. 8,* he explains:

> God in His love stooped and came down, to mingle His love with the waters,
> and to unite the nature of His majesty with the weak bodies of humans.
> By means of the waters he found a way to come down and to dwell among us;
> like to the way of love He came down and dwelt in the womb:
> O the love of God Who seeks for Himself all occasions to dwell among us!

6. Brock, "The Syrian Baptismal Rites," *Concilium* 122 (1979): 99.

He stooped and came down to the cave in Horeb,
and He extended his shadow of his majesty on Moses;
He mixed His glorious splendor to a mortal.
There was therein a figure of Baptism:
For He came down to dwell in it, in the water he had tempered
the might of His majesty, that He may dwell among the infirm
On Moses dwelt the Breath, and on you the plentitude of Christ.
That might then none could endure;
not Moses chief of deliverers, nor Elijah chief of zealots;
and the Seraphim too veil their faces, for it is the might that subdues all.
His love mingled gentleness in the water and the oil;
that humanity in its weakness might be able to stand before Him
when covered by the water and the oil.[7]

In his *Hymn on the Epiphany, No. 9,* Ephrem further teaches that baptism renders humans as children of the Spirit and that Christ becomes the new Adam and the new head of the body of Christians. Ephrem also symbolizes the power of divinization by speaking of a column extending from the Jordan to the heavens. He describes John as seeing the Spirit on the head of Christ, who as the "Head of the Highest" was baptized and became "Head on earth." Christians are therefore children of the Spirit, members of Christ who is the Head. Ephrem continues:

Open wide your spirits and see, my brothers,
the hidden column in the air,
whose base is fixed in the water
and rises up to the gate on High,
like the ladder that Jacob saw.
Behold by it a light descends on Baptism,
and the spirit goes up to Heaven,
that in one love we may be reunited.[8]

7. See Cassingena, *Hymnes,* 73–74.
8. Ibid., 88.

In regard to this citation, it can also be noted that, in the earlier Syriac tradition, Christ was seen as consecrating the waters of the Jordan in terms of the imagery of fire. This may be a reflection of Isaiah 6:6. Sebastian Brock cites Jacob of Serugh as saying, "The Holy One came to the water to go down to be baptized; his fire kindled among the waters and set them alight." The Syriac tradition sometimes referred to the Jordan as a furnace.[9]



> The Maronite liturgy in the ritual for baptism reflects the tradition. It says concerning Christ: "He who was without need or lacking was baptized in the Jordan consecrating for us this womb which is the baptismal font, a salutary and fruitful womb. He, thence, according to his design, Yours and that of the Holy Spirit, lived in the world, in three dwellings: the womb of flesh, the baptismal womb, and the obscure dwellings of sheol."[10] An ancient Maronite hymn for Epiphany declares: "His fire burns among the waves, and it inflames them. . . . A coal ignites in the waves; the conflagration of the flame spreads down below."[11]

THE SPIRIT ON THE WATERS

One with Christ in divinizing the waters of the Jordan is the action of his Spirit. The same Spirit who descends on Mary to bring about Christ in her womb exercises a similar action in the waters of Jordan, which becomes the maternal womb of all Christians.[12] In his *Hymn on the Epiphany, No. 6,* Ephrem speaks of the Spirit descending and sanctifying the waters "as he hovered." At the Jordan the Spirit descended only on Christ, but

9. Brock, "Baptismal Themes," 327.

10. Augustin Mouhanna, *Les rites de l'initiation dans l'église maronite* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studorum, 1978), 50–51.

11. Tabet, "Beth-Gazo," 294–95.

12. Saber, *Théologie baptismale,* 172.

now he descends and takes his abode on all who are baptized.[13] In his *Sermon on the Lord, No. 53,* Ephrem understands the Spirit as now present in the waters of baptism itself:

> Therefore, because the Spirit was with the Son, he came to John to receive from him baptism, that he might mingle with the visible waters the invisible Spirit; that they whose bodies should feel the moistening of the water, their souls should feel the gift of the Spirit; that even as the bodies outwardly feel the pouring of the water upon them, so the souls inward may feel the pouring of the Spirit upon them.[14]

ALL WATERS CONSECRATED BY CHRIST

The entry of Christ into the Jordan was understood as consecrating all waters of the earth. Sebastian Brock cites Jacob of Serugh saying, "The entire nature of the waters perceived that you had visited them — seas, deeps, rivers, springs and pools all thronged together to receive the blessing from your footsteps."[15]

Brock uses this belief to explain why in some Antiochene baptismal rituals the epiklesis is referred to Christ rather than the Father. He reasons that if the tradition was that Christ sanctified all baptismal water, then it is understandable that he should be asked to send his Spirit to bring about sanctification.[16]



In the Maronite liturgy at the blessing of the water for the feast of the Holy Cross, the celebrant prays: "O Lord you sanctified all waters when you received baptism in the Jordan

13. Cited by Thomas M. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate: West and East Syria* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 166–67.

14. Leonel Mitchell, "Four Fathers on Baptism: St. John Chrysostom, St. Ephraem, Theodore of Mopsuestia," in *Studies on Syrian Baptismal Rites,* edited by Jacob Vellian, 47 (Kottayam, India: C.M.S. Press, 1973).

15. Brock, "Baptismal Themes," 327.

16. Brock, "The Epiklesis in the Antiochene Baptismal Ordines," *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 197 (1972): 197.

> River." In the Maronite rite of Baptism the deacon chants: "O Christ our God through your holy baptism you sanctify the waters of the Jordan and all waters." The "prayer of forgiveness" for the feast of Epiphany declares: "You [Christ] were baptized in the Jordan River by your forerunner, John, so that by your baptism water would be made holy to bring us a new birth."

THE EFFECTS OF BAPTISM

Baptism as a "New Womb"

Symbolizing and effecting redemption, baptism reverses the effects of Adam's sin and begins to restore the original condition. Most importantly, baptism is seen as a new creation and new birth. The water of baptism easily represents the idea of a womb and is also seen as symbolizing primeval water. Ephrem develops this idea in his *Hymn on the Epiphany, No. 13,* when he says, "Baptism is a mother who engenders each day spiritual infants and gives to God new and holy sons."[17]

Ephrem ties in the idea of new birth with forgiveness of sins. In his *Hymn on Virginity, No. 7,* he speaks of the baptized being anointed with oil and receiving forgiveness from all their sins. The baptized who were sordid with sin arise from the "second womb" of baptism, pure as infants.[18]

Jacob of Serugh refers to a new birth given to Adam and relates baptism to immortality and spirituality. He says:

> A new mother instead of the old has been given to the prostrate Adam;
> and when she gives birth to him he will find salvation.
> For instead of Eve, Baptism has entered and taken her stand
> ready to give birth to immortality in spirituality;
> instead of that mother who gave birth to feeble corpses,

17. Cited by Saber, *Théologie baptismale,* 177.
18. Brock, *Harp,* 48–49.

this mother gives birth to living beings, rational and immortal. . . .
The womb of water, in place of the bodily womb has begun
to produce rational "images," in a spiritual way.[19]

This theme is reflected in the baptismal rituals. As early as in a baptismal ritual attributed to Timothy of Alexandria (d. 477) we find the following prayer: "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, through whose great and unutterable gift the baptismal water has been sanctified by the coming of thy living and holy Spirit, so as to become the spiritual womb which gives birth to the new man in place of the old."[20]



The Maronite liturgy reflects clearly and precisely this idea of baptism as a new womb. In the baptismal ritual the prayer over the water declares: "As the womb of our mother Eve gave birth to mortal children subject to corruption, so may the womb of this baptismal font give birth to heavenly and incorruptible children. And as the Holy Spirit hovered over the waters at the work of creation and gave life to living creatures and animals of every kind, may he hover over this baptismal font which is a spiritual womb. May he dwell within it and sanctify it. Let it change the earthly Adam into a spiritual one. May all who enter into it to be baptized be permanently changed and receive a spiritual nature instead a corporal one, a participation in the invisible reality, instead of a visible one, and instead of a weak spirit, let your life-giving Spirit dwell within them."

A similar theology is reflected in the sedro prayer of the Maronite morning office of the First Sunday after Epiphany. It prays: "O God who in your love have become human, you were born corporeally to allow humans to accede to filial adoption and you have made them children of your Father by

19. Brock, "Baptismal Themes," 345–46.

20. Brock, "A New Syrian Baptismal Ordo Attributed to Timothy of Alexandria," in *Studies on Syrian Baptismal Rites,* 82.

> water and the Spirit. You, who formed children in the womb, have voluntarily enclosed yourself in the womb to renew the image of Adam that the corruption of sin had tarnished and degraded, and you have renewed it by the fire of the pure spiritual light that is baptism. You, who have no need, have come to be baptized to sanctify the waters of the Jordan in your goodness . . . as in your baptism you have vested us in the adornment of glory and marked us with the seal of your living and Holy Spirit, so you have called us to be spiritual children by the second birth, that of baptism which purifies sins. Likewise, by your powerful and invincible force, make us glorify you with smiling faces, confident as very loved children."

A New "Image"

As we have seen, a key element in Syriac anthropology is that humans are in the image of God, an image first stamped on Adam, but distorted when Adam sinned. Baptism is seen as restoring this image. For example, in his *Hymn on Virginity, No. 7,* Ephrem chants:

> The royal image is painted with visible colors.
> With visible oil is painted the hidden image of the invisible king.
> Baptism has conceived in its womb those who are signed.
> It creates a new image in place of the image
> corrupted by the first Adam.[21]

In his *Hymn on Virginity, No. 48,* Ephrem sees in the restored image a sign of divinization: "The son has made beautiful the servant's deformity and he has become a god, just as he desired."[22]

Jacob of Serugh continues the tradition and stresses that the new human is cast in the imprint of Christ himself. He presents Christ explaining to John the Baptizer:

21. Cited by Saber, *Théologie baptismale,* 162.
22. Brock, "Syrian Baptismal Rites," 103.

I am entering the furnace of water so that mankind,
who have grown worn out, may be recast with my imprint.
I desire them to come, as I do, to the fountain
so that they may be imprinted spiritually with my coin.[23]



The Maronite liturgy reflects this teaching. In a baptismal ritual attributed to Jacob of Serugh, the priest imposing incense recites the following prayer:

O God who, by your love, have become man, being born of the holy Virgin in an incomprehensible fashion without human seed, to lead men to the condition of sons of your Father, making them sons of your Father by means of water; you who fashion children in the womb, have freely become a child to renew the image of Adam damaged and having grown old by sin, renewing him by the fire of that spiritual and salutary Furnace, which is the baptismal font.[24] The "qolo" for the weekdays of Epiphany chants: "Eternally God the Father's own Son has humbled himself to save us from sin. With waters, he cleansed his image in us." Another "qolo" declares: "Our image, grown old, he willed to renew and joined us to him when he had appeared." The "prayer of forgiveness" for the Sundays of Epiphany declares: "O Creator of life, you became man in order to renew the image of Adam which grew old and distorted because of sin."

"Robe of Glory"

Besides divine filiation and the restoration of the divine image, the "robe of glory" symbolizes sanctification. If Adam and Eve lost the robe of glory, Christ brings it back, and it is restored in baptism. Ephrem in his *Hymn on the Epiphany, No. 12* teaches:

23. Brock, "Baptismal Themes," 337–38.
24. Mouhanna, *Rites,* 16–17.

In Baptism Adam found that glory
that was among the trees [of paradise].
He descended, and received it out of the water;
he put it on, then went up and was adorned with honor.
Blessed be He who has mercy on all.
. . . .
The wedded couple were adorned in Eden;
but the serpent stole their crowns:
yet mercy crushed the serpent,
and made the wedded couple splendid in their raiment.
Blessed be he who has mercy on all![25]

Jacob of Serugh repeats this theme when he says, "Baptism gives back to Adam the robe of glory which the serpent had stolen from among the trees." For Jacob, besides the robe, the baptized also put on *zayna,* protective armor, against the arrows of Satan.[26]

In his *Hymn on the Epiphany, No. 4,* Ephrem reflects on the idea of the baptized putting off their garments and putting on Christ. In so doing, he also brings in the ideas of deification and immortality. He says:

Descend my sealed brothers, put on Our Lord,
and be joined to his lineage,
for He is son of a great lineage:
He so declared in Proverbs.
His Nature is from on high,
and His vesture from below,
Each is attached to that vesture forever,
who casts off his own vesture.
You too in the water, obtain from him a robe,
that does not wear out or fall into tatters,
it is the robe which clothes those who wear it forever.[27]

25. See Cassingena, *Hymnes,* 107.
26. Brock, "Baptismal Themes," 336–37.
27. See Cassingena, *Hymnes,* 43.



The Maronite ritual of Baptism in its sedro prays: "As you clothed us with the robe of glory and signed us with the seal of the living Holy Spirit, and as you called us to become spiritual children reborn through Baptism, make us worthy to glorify." The "prayer of forgiveness" for the Sundays of Epiphany declares: "You have clothed us with your baptism: the robe of glory and the seal of the Holy Spirit. You have called us to be spiritual children through the second birth of baptism which purifies all sinners."

The Gift of the Spirit

If baptism brings about rebirth, its second great gift is that of the Spirit. The Spirit not only consecrates the waters, but also resides in the new Christian. Aphrahat, as noted, bases his anthropology on a distinction of body, soul, and spirit, focuses on the reception of the Holy Spirit in baptism as essential to humanity's future immortality. In his *Demonstration, No. 6,* he teaches that at baptism when the priests invoke the Holy Spirit, the heavens open and the Spirit descends upon the waters. The baptized are clothed with the Spirit, who is distant from those born of the flesh, until they are baptized. In the first birth, humans are created with animal souls, but in baptism they receive the Holy Spirit and are not again subject to death. When humans die, the animal soul is buried with the body, but the heavenly spirit goes to Christ. Aphrahat continues, "And the animal spirit shall be swallowed up in the heavenly Spirit, and the whole man shall become spiritual, since his body is possessed by it [the Spirit]. And death shall be swallowed up in life, and body shall be swallowed up in Spirit."[28]

In his *Hymn on the Epiphany, No. 5,* Ephrem describes the presence of the Spirit:

28. Aphraat, *Select Demonstrations,* trans. Johnston, in Schaff and Wace, *Select Library of Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers,* 13:371 and following.

Descend, brothers, put on
from the pool of baptism the Holy Spirit;
be joined with the spiritual beings that serve the Divinity.
For He is the secret fire that seals his flock,
with the three spiritual names,
who terrify the Evil One.[29]

Jacob of Serugh, reflecting on the biblical teaching, declares that through the Spirit Christ has made us his brothers and sisters. The Father sends the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, and through the Spirit we can truly call God "our Father."[30]



The Maronite ritual for baptism attributed to Jacob of Serugh prays in the blessing of the water: "Let all who enter into it receive spiritual strength in place of the weakness of the flesh. Together with this natural life let them receive a spiritual one, and in addition to this visible world, let them receive a participation in the invisible one, and in place of a weak spirit let your life giving Spirit dwell within them."

OTHER EFFECTS

Based on the scriptures, a principal effect of baptism is the forgiveness of sin. This is repeated often by the Syriac fathers. One way in which the removal of sins is described is under the idea of regaining of freedom. In the *Hymn on the Epiphany, No. 4,* Ephrem uses the imagery of leaven in the waters to describe the freedom Christ effects:

The Divinity has mixed
his leaven in the water;
the leaven raises up
in the mud formed of earth,
and it is steeped in the divine.

29. See Cassingena, *Hymnes,* 49.

30. Brock, "Baptismal Themes," 335.

For it is the leaven of the Lord,
that can spread into the serf,
and draw him into freedom;
it has joined the serf to Nobility,
to Him, the Lord of all.
For the serf who has put on in the waters
the Deliverer of all,
though he be a servant on earth,
is a free man on high:
freedom is his adornment.[31]

For Ephrem baptism is both a recalling of the state of humans before the sin in paradise and a pledge of the world to come. Being joined to the church by baptism, humans are in route to the future kingdom.[32]



The Maronite liturgy summarizes the effects of Baptism in the sedro of the Sunday after Epiphany: "O God, You became man out of your love for us. You were born of the flesh to gather humanity to the adoption of Your Father to make them his children through water and the Holy Spirit. O creator of Life, You became a man in order to renew the image of Adam, which grew old and distorted because of sin. . . . You have clothed us with your baptism, the robe of glory and the seal of the Holy Spirit. You have called us to be spiritual children through the second birth of baptism, which purifies all sinners."

THE CROSS AND BAPTISM

If the baptism of Christ in the Jordan originates the mystery of baptism, it is also a foreshadowing of Christ's death on the cross and the blood and water that will pour forth from his pierced

31. See Cassingena, *Hymnes,* 44.
32. Saber, *Théologie baptismale,* 173–74.

side. For the Syriac fathers the water from the side of Christ could only be living water and therefore another element in the constitution of the mystery of baptism. In his *Hymn on Baptism, No. 11,* Ephrem declares, "Baptism is the well-spring of life, which the Son of God opened by his life; and from his side it has brought forth streams."[33] A similar theme is developed in his *Hymn on Epiphany, No. 5,* when he says, "Lo! from the side of Christ flowed the stream that was the medicine of life. The weary 'nations' drank, and in it forgot their ills."[34]



In the morning office for Sunday, the sedro prays: "Admirable marvel: day before yesterday, the king was crucified and underwent suffering; today he is victorious in his Resurrection. Two days ago, the lance opened his side; today, by his goodness baptism has been inaugurated."

Ephrem further develops the idea of the cross as a cross of light with its relationship with the waters of baptism. In his *Hymn on the Epiphany, No. 13,* he says, "The Crucified is a brilliant sun who diffused his light in the water [of baptism]. He calls the nations who are held in darkness to descend [in the water], to be clothed in the light, to adorn themselves, and give out rays in his light."[35]

As also noted previously, Jacob of Serugh speaks more explicitly of baptism being established on the cross. He sees the new birth as occurring in water and blood and sees that the Holy Spirit is breathed into the newly baptized. In his homily on the three baptisms, Jacob says:

> Christ came and opened up baptism by his Cross,
> so that it should be a mother of life for the world in place of Eve

33. Mitchell, "Four Fathers," 46.
34. See Cassingena, *Hymnes,* 51.
35. Cited by Saber, *Théologie baptismale,* 178.

water and blood for the fashioning of spiritual babes
flowed forth from it, and baptism became the mother of life.
No previous baptism [i.e., of Moses or John] ever gave the Holy Spirit
only the baptism which was opened by the Son of God on the Cross;
it gives birth to children spiritually with "the water and the blood,"
and, instead of a soul, the Holy Spirit is breathed into them.[36]



This belief is reflected in the Maronite baptismal liturgy. In the ancient ritual, the epiklesis prayer includes the following: "Let the Holy Spirit descend upon this water and sanctify it. Let him fill it with unfailing strength, let him bless it. Let it become as the water that flowed from the side of your only Son upon the cross, so that it may purify and cleanse all who are baptized in it."[37] The "prayer of forgiveness" of the Sunday of the Resurrection declares: "Yesterday his side was pierced by a lance, and today, in his compassion, he opened for us the waters of baptism."

Along these lines, Augustin Mouhanna concludes from his work on the Maronite baptismal liturgy that the proper day for the celebration of baptism in the Maronite church is Epiphany, not Easter. He cites the medieval Maronite canonical work *Kitab al-Hoda* as an indication. It says, "He [Jesus] was baptized by John, his servant; when he received the Holy Spirit and baptism, he fasted for forty days and forty nights, to teach us by that that every Christian ought first to be baptized and receive the spiritual vestment of consecrated water. And, when he puts on the Holy Spirit by baptism, he ought then to practice the first of all obligations: the fast of forty days, as the Savior of the world had done."[38]

36. Cited by Brock, "Epiklesis," 212.

37. See Brock, "New Syrian Baptismal Ordo," 81; and Brock, "A Short Melkite Baptismal Service in Syriac," *Parole de l'Orient* 3 (1972): 124.

38. See Pierre Fahed, *Kitab al-Huda* (Aleppo: 1935), 113; cited by Mouhanna, *Rites,* 260.

THE ANOINTINGS

Besides the waters of baptism, an integral element in the process of initiation into the flock of Christ is the action of anointing. When one considers the symbolism of olive oil and the vine and even the "tree of life" in the Syriac mind, it is not surprising that anointing should be the vehicle of representing both the presence of Christ and the action of the Spirit.

Since the title "Christ" itself means the "Anointed One," Ephrem in several places speaks of chrism as representing Christ. In his *Hymn on the Epiphany, No. 3,* he explains:

> Christ and oil are in partnership;
> the invisible is joined with the visible:
> the oil marks visibly; Christ seals secretly
> the new lambs of the Spirit,
> the flock to a twofold glory;
> since it is conceived with oil,[39]
> and is born from water.
> How exalted is your rank!
> while the sinner anointed as a servant,
> the feet of her Lord,
> for you, it is Christ himself as a servant
> through his ministers marks your bodies with anointing.
> It befits the Lord of the flock,
> to sign his servants in person.[40]

In his *Hymn on Virginity, No. 7,* Ephrem uses the image of painter and painting to describe the new Adam produced by baptismal anointing:

> A royal portrait is painted with visible colours,
> and with oil that all can see is the hidden portrait of our hidden King portrayed

39. This perhaps refers to a pre-baptismal anointing.
40. See Cassingena, *Hymnes,* 31.

on those who have been signed: on them baptism, that is in travail
with them in its womb,
depicts the new portrait, to replace the image of the former Adam
who was corrupted; it gives birth to them with triple pangs,
accompanied by the three glorious names, of Father, Son and Holy
Spirit.[41]

In the *Hymn on the Faith, No. 82,* Ephrem compares the newly baptized as pearl divers. Just as the divers strip and anoint themselves with oil, so those baptized are anointed. Continuing the pearl-diving analogy, Ephrem sees in the act of obtaining the pearl the divers, symbolizing Christ, rescuing the soul from the mouth of "Leviathan."[42] Sebastian Brock points out that in a number of hymns on oil and the olive Ephrem further deals with the theme of oil as a type of Christ [the "Anointed One"].[43]

The fact that chrism continued to represent Christ in the Syriac tradition is seen in such writings as those of Jacob of Edessa. In his "Discourse on the Myron," he explains:

Thus, by means of a comparison with what cannot be compared, it portrays for us Jesus, the simple one who came to composition (*rukkaba*, in Syriac), [Jesus] who is the overflowing fountainhead of divine fragrance, filling the intellect with divine assignments, as a result of the wonderful quality of the scent of knowledge.[44]

If the oil represents Christ, "the Anointed," it is the Holy Spirit who anointed Christ at his baptism. Therefore, oil is the vehicle whereby the Holy Spirit effects his power. Ephrem in his *Hymn on Virginity, No. 7,* teaches this clearly, as well as the idea of the anointing as a sealing. He refers to the oil as a disciple of the Holy Spirit. The oil is like a signet ring by which

41. Brock, *Harp,* 48.
42. Ibid, 33.
43. Ibid., 46–47.
44. Brock, "Jacob of Edessa's Discourse on the Myron," *Oriens Christianus* 63 (1979): 33.

the Holy Spirit imprints his hidden seal. The bodies of those anointed at baptism are marked with the baptismal mystery.[45]

We should also keep in mind that while Ephrem and the other Syriac writers focus their attention on Christ or the Spirit, there are a number of references to the indwelling of the Trinity. For example, in his *Hymn on the Epiphany, No. 3,* Ephrem states, "The Spirit dwelt in him [David] and made song in him. Your anointing which you have is greater, since the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have departed and come down to dwell in you."[46]

SEAL AND PROTECTION

The idea of "seal" has a rich history in the Jewish and Syriac traditions. It has the meaning of ownership, a mark of authenticity, and takes on an eschatological character. In the Jewish tradition it also referred to circumcision. In the Syriac world it took on these meanings as well as the idea of protection in combat against evil. This concept of protection is especially related to being signed on the forehead.[47]

Ephrem sees the gesture of sealing as distinguishing the true flock and, in so doing, serves as a protection from sin and evil. In the *Hymn on the Epiphany, No. 3,* he declares:

> As for you, you are the flock placed,
> among pagans and unbelievers,
> and the Truth has signed you with oil
> to distinguish you from those who have strayed.
> . . . . The oil of Christ distinguishes
> those who are initiated from the profane:
> so that by it those who are within are separated clearly,
> from those that are without.

45. Brock, *Harp,* 48–49.

46. See Cassingena, *Hymnes,* 34.

47. Vincent Van Vossel, "Le terme et la notion de 'sceau' dans le rituel baptismal des syriens orientaux," *L'Orient Syrien* 10 (1965): 244–56; see also Albertus Frederik Johannes Kiljn, "Baptism in the Acts of Thomas," in *Studies on Syrian Baptismal Rites,* 61.

. . . . The sheep of Christ leaped for joy,
to receive the seal of life, that standard of kings
which has ever put sin to flight.
The Evil One is terrified by the standard,
iniquities are confounded and scattered;
Come, sheep, receive your sign,
which puts to flight those who would devour you![48]

For Jacob of Serugh, "baptism, the daughter of lights, provides the mark of the king." Jacob speaks of the mark both in the image of the branding of sheep and in terms of coins being stamped.[49] Jacob of Edessa continues the tradition when he says:

This oil, then, is the beginning of the heavenly path, the ladder which leads up to heaven, the armor against hostile powers, the indissoluble imprint of the king, the sign which delivers from the fire, the guardian of the faithful, driving off the demons; it gives joy to angels, it is both living and life-giving, full of great things entrusted of wondrous mysteries.[50]



In the ancient Maronite baptismal ritual, the sedro prayer petitions: "And may all harms of the enemy be far removed from their lives, and may they have only thy holy seal as a guide and guardian."[51] The embolism prayer in the Maronite Anaphora for consecrating the waters of baptism prays: "O good Shepherd, you find those who stray and sign your flock with the sign of the glorious Trinity. Protect this flock from the ravenous wolf in your glorious name." In the "Intercession for the departed" in the *Anaphora of Saint John,* we read: "Remember, O Lord, in your grace, those who have left us and have gone to you, from the first Christian disciples until to-

48. See Cassingena, *Hymnes,* 32–37.
49. Brock, "Baptismal Themes," 338.
50. Brock, "Jacob of Edessa's," 33.
51. Brock, "New Syrian Baptismal Ordo," 74.

day. They were baptized and sealed with your sign [*brushmo*], and received the precious Body and Blood of your Son."

Ephrem, in his *Hymn on Virginity, No. 7,* declares clearly that oil purifies and forgives sin. He describes oil as a "beneficial fountain" that wipes out sins as the flood had destroyed the unclean. The oil removes sins in baptism because sin is drowned in the water. The oil, like Christ, out of love pays for debts not its own.[52]

Jacob of Edessa in his "Discourse on the Myron" speaks of several meanings and effects of chrism. For example, referring to the Old Testament practice of anointing prophets, priests, and kings, he explains that Christians are anointed and thereby perfected as priests and disciples of the apostles. Therefore, they stand before God "as a holy people, a redeemed assembly, a royal priesthood, a choice and sweet-scented nation, and one resplendent in an invisible garment."[53] He also employs the bridal imagery of the Old Testament and states that the Church as bride of God the Word who became man "compares him to oil because he anointed and united with his eternal Godhead our temporal humanity."[54]

PRE- AND POST-BAPTISMAL ANOINTING

The consensus among scholars seems to be that, in the early Syriac tradition, the principal anointing representing the action of the Holy Spirit occurred before baptismal immersion. Brock and others have observed that the Pauline teaching on baptism as a burial and rising with Christ is not found in early Syriac baptismal texts. In fact, Brock points out that the pre-baptismal anointing is "charismatic" in character as compared to the "ca-

52. Brock, *Harp,* 49.
53. Brock, "Jacob of Edessa's," 30.
54. Ibid., 31.

thartic and exorcistic" role that this anointing has in other traditions.[55] From a study of the works of Ephrem, Leonel Mitchell claims that the liturgy of baptism consists principally of a pre-baptismal anointing and baptismal immersion. He notes that in the *Hymn on the Epiphany, No. 3,* Ephrem speaks of the sealing with oil of lepers at their cleansing before the priest leads them to the washing.[56] Gabrielle Winkler notes that the oldest Syriac sources of the third and fourth centuries regularly call the pre-baptismal anointing of the head *rushma* (sign, mark), while the term *hatma* (seal) is normally reserved for the post-baptismal anointing that was introduced at the end of the fourth century.[57] Brock adds that the pre-baptismal anointing was originally on the forehead, but later it was extended to the whole body, which sometimes gave rise to two separate pre-baptismal anointings.[58]

On the other hand, from the fifth century on there are references to a post-baptismal anointing. A possible reference to it is found in Theodore of Mopsuestia. It is witnessed to by the *Apostolic Constitutions,* Pseudo-Dionysius, Severus, and John of Tella.[59]

Several factors may have been involved in the institution of a post-baptismal anointing. Winkler and Brock observe that by the end of the fourth century a stress is given to the Pauline understanding of baptism as a death and burial. The font comes to be seen as a grave rather than a womb, and the pre-baptismal anointing loses its charismatic character. Therefore, the change

55. Brock, "Syrian Baptismal Rites," 100.

56. Mitchell, "Four Fathers," 44.

57. Gabrielle Winkler, "The Original Meaning of the Pre-Baptismal Anointing and Its Implications," *Worship* 52 (1978): 27.

58. Brock, "Syrian Baptismal Rites," 98; see also Brock, "The Transition to a Post-Baptismal Anointing in the Antiochene Rite," in *The Sacrifice of Praise,* edited by Brian D. Spinks, 215 Ephemerides Liturgicae Subsidia 19 (Rome: Editione Liturgiche, 1981).

59. Alphonse Raes, "Où se trouve la confirmation dans le rite syro-oriental?" *L'Orient Syrien* 1 (1956): 244–45; see also Brock, "Short Melkite," 120–21.

of emphasis from a Johannine to a Pauline imagery resulted in the reinterpretation of the pre-baptismal anointing as something cathartic and protective.[60]

Edward Craddock Ratcliff stresses that the church of Jerusalem and perhaps its proximity to the holy places might have accounted for the emphasis on the death and burial of Christ. Cyril of Jerusalem describes two distinct anointings. In the third mystagogical homily he speaks of a pre-baptismal anointing that was made with the oil of exorcism, in the fourth homily of an anointing with chrism (*myron*). Cyril explains that the new ceremony of anointing with myron is a symbol of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus to "anoint" him after his ascent out of the water from his baptism. Therefore, the focus is now on the Holy Spirit descending on Christ after he ascended from the Jordan. Differing from his predecessors, Cyril distinguishes between Christ's descent into the water and the event that followed it. Cyril reinterprets the first anointing as the means of "expelling every trace of the adversary and purify the traces of sin." For Cyril, following the Pauline idea of Romans 6:3–5, the threefold submersion in the water now symbolizes Christ's three days of burial in the tomb.[61]

While rejecting Ratcliff's topographical argument regarding Jerusalem and the holy places, Winkler also cites especially the writings of Cyril of Jerusalem, along with those of John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia, as focusing on the soul's confrontation with demonic powers rather than stressing the charismatic effect of the anointing. The preparation of the catechumens for baptism is viewed as a battle with Satan. She points out that catechumens underwent daily exorcisms during their period of preparation and that this became a predominant

60. Brock, "Syrian Baptismal Rites," 100; and Brock, "Epiklesis," 207.

61. Edward Craddock Ratcliff, "The Old Syrian Baptismal Tradition and Its Resettlement under the Influence of Jerusalem in the Fourth Century," in *Studies on Syrian Baptismal Rites,* 88–98.

factor in the western half of Syria and Palestine.[62] Winkler reasons that, since the preparatory rites now had a predominantly cathartic and exorcistic character and were seen as an indispensable condition for receiving the Spirit, the pre-baptismal anointing could no longer be the actual gift of the Spirit. A catechumen had to be purified and have his sins washed away before he could receive the Spirit. Winkler claims that an anointing after baptism was introduced to signify the coming of the Spirit.[63]

Brock is of the opinion that the shift in the meaning of the pre-baptismal anointing is due to a shift in emphasis that occurred with the rapid Christianization of the Roman Empire in the fourth century after Constantine's conversion. Prior to this time its Jewish origins had a strong influence on Syriac Christianity. After this time a more Hellenized character manifested itself. In the early period the pre-baptismal anointing was the new Christian equivalent of circumcision, and the baptized were understood as anointed into the royal priesthood. Therefore, the *rushma* signified ownership, sonship, and priesthood. According to Brock, the new mentality encouraged a protective interpretation of the anointing. He claims that since the Old Testament basis for the anointing as signifying the anointing of priests had a charismatic character, this would also tend to be pushed into the background as Christianity became more institutionalized. There is now more attention paid to the baptism of Christ as the model for Christian baptism and to the fact that the Holy Spirit only appeared after Christ had gone up from the water. As noted, more emphasis is given to the Pauline interpretation of Christ's baptism signifying death and resurrection. For Brock the imagery of the font as a grave clashes with the earlier understanding of the *rushma* as signifying anything

62. Winkler, "Original Meaning," 39–40.
63. Ibid., 40–41.

positive such as sonship. Therefore, the way is open for the introduction of a post-baptismal anointing to incorporate these positive elements. Brock concludes that the tensions brought about by the developments of the late fourth century "created an inner dynamic within the rite itself that cried out for the introduction of a new post-baptismal anointing to take over those characteristics which it was no longer thought possible to associate with the *rushma*." The *rushma* was left with only a protective and cathartic meaning.[64]

Another possible element affecting the institution of a post-baptismal anointing was the decision of the Council of Laodicaea (363) on what to do with those who were validly baptized by heretics but did not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The council teaches that those who have been validly baptized but were heretical at the time should anathematize the heresy, learn the creed, and then, after having been anointed with holy chrism, communicate in the holy mysteries. This understanding would seem to impose a post-baptismal anointing in order to receive the Spirit for those already baptized.[65]

Bernard Botte and others conjecture that this anointing to receive the "gift of the Spirit" is then extended to all. This would explain the forty-eighth canon of the Council of Laodicaea, which stated, "It is necessary that those who have been baptized be, after baptism, anointed with celestial chrism and rendered participants of the kingdom of Christ."[66] Winkler, however, is skeptical about this explanation of the post-baptismal anointing and tends to believe that the inner dynamic at play in changing the meaning of baptism from the memory of Christ's baptism in the Jordan to a cathartic emphasis is the best explanation.[67]

64. Brock, "Transition," 217–25.

65. Bernard Botte, "Post-Baptismal Anointing in the Ancient Patriarchate of Antioch," in *Studies on Syrian Baptismal Rites,* 63–71.

66. Raes, "Où se trouve," 245–46.

67. Winkler, "Original Meaning," 42n63.

We might conclude the discussion with a caution made by Brock and others. The baptismal rite in the Syriac church always had two constitutive elements, anointing and baptism, irrespective of the order in which these elements occur. However, the development of the post-baptismal anointing, both as to place and meaning, was quite different from the mentality of the West. Therefore, it would be misleading to try to draw parallels between the two traditions.[68]

68. Brock, "Syrian Baptismal Rites," 98–99.

10

MYSTERIES OF INITIATION

THE EUCHARIST

From the earliest tradition the Eucharist was seen as the completion of initiation into the discipleship of Christ. It is the Eucharist that constitutes church and that is the central mystery. All other sacramental celebrations receive their meaning from the Eucharist. One could use a reverse form of reasoning and claim that the purpose of baptism itself is to render one worthy of partaking of the Eucharist. All these themes are to be found among the Syriac fathers.

In the Eastern mind one does not give priority to the idea of church as sacrament and then understand the seven sacraments by some form of analogy. Rather, it is the Eucharist that is formative of the church. The Eucharist and church are primordial realities, essentially, bearing the same names: communion, the body of Christ. The Eucharist imparts charity but within the context of a visible fellowship. The other sacraments bring humans to a suitable state wherein they can participate fruitfully

in the central sacrament. In this view, baptism is a preparation for Eucharistic fellowship.[1]

As noted previously, Ephrem considers the body of Christ as the vehicle of salvation. That same body in which Christ healed humans and rose again he gave us in sacramental form to heal us, to incorporate us in him in the church, and to give us a pledge of his resurrection.[2]

In another sense the sacraments also represent a "kenosis" of divine power in a creaturely reality. Ephrem in his *Hymn on the Faith, No. 6* summarizes the kenosis involved in the sacraments, the incarnation, and revelation:

For in the Bread is eaten a strength not to be eaten
and in the Wine is drunk a might not to be drunk;
in the Oil we have anointing with a power
not for ointment to take pleasure and eat,
He has softened his appearance for the eyes and
his might in words, that the ear may hear him.[3]

From the earliest days of the church the Eucharist was seen as a great corporate act of the whole people. Theodore of Mopsuestia in his *Mystagogical Cathecheses* seems to presuppose that all who are present will partake of communion. He says:

The priest prays that the grace of the holy spirit may come also on all those present, in order that . . . they may be knit here as if into one body by the communion of the flesh of our Lord. . . .

All of us partake of it [the holy bread] equally, as all of us are one body of Christ our Lord, and all of us partake of the same body and blood. As through the second birth and through the holy spirit all of us become one body of Christ, so also by one nourishment of the holy

1. Adrian Hastings, "The Sacramentality of the Church," *Eastern Churches Quarterly* 16 (1964): 222–25.

2. Murray, *Symbols,* 69–70.

3. Cited by Murray, "Hymn of St. Ephrem," 147.

sacrament, through which the grace of the holy spirit feeds us, all of us are in fellowship in Christ our Lord.[4]

The Syriac writers presume a direct relationship between baptism and the Eucharist. If baptism incorporates the candidate into the church, it also permits him to have access to the Holy Eucharist that is the cause and manifestation of that incorporation. For Aphrahat, "When his heart has been circumcised from evil works, one then proceeds to baptism, the consummation of the true circumcision; he is joined to the people of God and participates in the body and blood of Christ."[5] Ephrem draws a direct link between baptism and the Eucharist when he declares, "Once this womb has given birth, the altar suckles and nurtures them: her children eat straight away, not milk, but perfect bread."[6] Ephrem also teaches the idea that Christian initiation involves incorporation in his *Hymn on the Epiphany, No. 3:*

The figure has passed, the truth is realized,
with oil you have been signed,
by baptism you have been rendered perfect,
you have been mingled in the flock,
you have been nourished with his body.

In the Syriac liturgical tradition we have a similar idea expressed in the blessing over the baptismal water that prays, "And sanctify him in his soul and in his body and in his spirit. May he become a new child and a holy one, unto eternal life; and cause him to share in the holy body and blood, so that he

4. Francis Reine, *The Eucharistic Doctrine of the Liturgy of the Mystagogical Catecheses of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1942), 40, 48.

5. Aphrahat, *Demonstration No. 12 — On the Passover,* cited by Edward Duncan, *Baptism in the Demonstrations of Aphraates the Persian Sage* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1945), 145 and following.

6. *Hymn on Virginity, No. 7,* cited by Brock, *Harp,* 49.

may receive from them the propitiation of faults and forgiveness of sin, unto eternal life."[7]

EUCHARIST AS MYSTERY

The Syriac fathers were aware that in the Eucharist we are dealing with a great mystery, one that could be grasped only by faith. For Ephrem, as we have seen, the Eucharist is to be understood within the concept of image foreshadowing reality. In his *Hymn on the Nativity, No. 16,* he discusses the mystery of the Eucharist through a meditation by Mary:

When I see Your outward image
before my eyes, Your hidden image
is portrayed in my mind. In Your revealed image
I saw Adam, but in the hidden one
I saw Your Father who is united with You.
Have You shown your beauty in two images
to me alone? Let bread and the mind
portray You. Dwell in the bread
and in those who eat it. In hidden and revealed [form]
let your church see You as [does] the one who bore You.
....
Behold Your image is portrayed with the blood of the grapes
upon the bread and portrayed upon the heart
by the finger of love with the pigments of faith.[8]

EUCHARIST AS NOURISHMENT AND PLEDGE OF IMMORTALITY

Ephrem sees in the incarnation not only God revealing himself to us in finite form, but also the vehicle of our deification, ultimately by Christ giving his body to us. Ephrem explains in his *Homily on Our Lord:*

7. Brock, "Short Melkite," 124.
8. Ephrem, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns,* trans. McVey, 149–50.

[W]ith the yeast from the body of the one who completes, the deficiency of our creation was filled up. It would not have been appropriate for our Lord to sever a part of His body to fill up the deficiency of other bodies. He filled up the deficiency of the deficient with something He was able to separate from Himself. Just as mortals consume Him by means of something edible, in the same way He filled up the deficiency and gave life to mortality. So we should learn that the deficiency of the deficient was filled up from a body in which fullness resided. And life was given to mortals from a body in which life resided.[9]

While Christ does not literally cut off anything from his historical body, he gives us that which can be taken from him. Therefore, "of that which can be eaten, mortals eat him."

In his *Hymn on the Faith, No. 10,* Ephrem declares in poetic form that the power of the Eucharist overcomes the power of death. While death had devoured humans as bread, the bread that is the Eucharist kills death, as does the cup. By consuming the Eucharistic bread and wine we obtain life.[10]



The Maronite office for Easter reflects this theme in the first "*qolo.*" After speaking of the redemption of Christ, it observes: "The Church contemplates his meal, immolated, become nourishment, and his blood [become] spiritual drink; and she savors it each day, until she shall rejoice with him in the kingdom of heaven."[11] The "Intercession for the Departed" in the *Anaphora of Saint John Maron* prays: "May the Mystery of your Body and Blood be for them a pledge of life, a fire that consumes sins, and a burning coal that destroys transgressions" The concluding prayer of the *Epiklesis* in the *Anaphora of St. John* petitions: "May these holy Mysteries … be a pledge of the heavenly kingdom and new life, for ever."

9. Mathews and Amar, eds., *St. Ephrem the Syrian,* 287.
10. Murray, "Hymn of St. Ephrem," 144.
11. Khalifé-Hachem, "Office maronite," 288–89.

EUCHARIST AS FORGIVING SINS

In the Syriac tradition as well as that of other churches, the Eucharist is seen as forgiving sin. Jacob of Serugh refers to the Eucharist as the "house of forgiveness." It is intended to remit the sins of the world.[12] Joseph-Marie Sauget has published a Syriac homily on the sinner attributed to a Bishop John that says:

> Behold, it is written of the sinner that she kissed alone the feet of Christ,
> but it is not written that she received his body.
> And if the kisses of the sinner, given with faith, shook and overthrew
> the fortress of her debts, how much more we ourselves who embrace Him
> with love and receive Him with faith, shall we be purified of our faults and
> sins, and He will answer our requests.[13]



The various Syriac anaphoras declare in several places that the Eucharist forgives sins. In the *Anaphora of the Twelve Apostles* the prayer after the Epikelesis says: "May these holy life-giving mysteries be for the pardon of faults, the forgiveness of sins, the cure of our whole being and the strengthening of our consciences so that none of your faithful perish." In the prayer of absolution it declares: "Make us worthy to partake fully of these divine mysteries with purity and sanctity that through them we may be forgiven as we forgive each other." In the first prayer of thanksgiving, it asks: "that this divine Communion be for the forgiveness of sins."

The prayer of peace of the *Anaphora of James* says: "Con-

12. Bou Mansour, "L'Eucharistie chez Jacques de Saroug," *Parole de l'Orient* 17 (1992): 37–60, at 56–58.

13. Joseph-Marie Sauget, "Une homélie syriaque sur la pécheresse attribuée à un évêque Jean," *Parole de l'Orient* 6–7 (1975–76): 175.

fident in your mercy and not in our worthiness, we pray that this Mystery administered for the salvation of your people will not be for our condemnation but for the forgiveness of our sins."[14] At the epiklesis in the *Anaphora of John Chrysostom,* the celebrant in signing the bread prays that the Body of Christ be a "body that cleanses us of all sin," and in signing the chalice, that the Blood of Christ be a "blood that cleanses us from all sin." The prayer after the *Epiklesis* in various Syriac Anaphoras petitions: "that these mysteries in which we participate may purify our souls and bodies, forgive our sins and grant us life."

CONCLUSION

The theology of the Syriac churches lays heavy stress on the significance and interrelationship of the sacraments of initiation. In baptism one is dedicated to the Spirit, delivered from the impending judgment of God, and incorporated into the company redeemed by Christ's saving work. There is an illumination and deification of the soul and a new birth of the body with the putting on of Christ. Chrismation is the completion of baptism in which the candidate is anointed with the Spirit as Christ was in the waters of the Jordan. Both baptism and chrismation give one a foretaste of future benefits and are a pledge of immortality. However, baptism and chrismation can be understood only within the idea of church. They are administered and received in the social context of Christ's body, the church. On the other hand, it is the Eucharist that is formative of the church and imparts charity within the context of a visible fellowhsip. Baptism and chrismation are a preparation for eucharistic fellowship and give the candidate the right to receive the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the great corporate act of all the people. As nour-

14. See also Louis Ligier, "Dimension personnelle et dimension communitaire de la pénitence en Orient," *La Maison Dieu* 90 (1967): 173–75.

ishment sustaining the new life received in baptism, the Eucharist maintains the soul in its foretaste of immortal life. It is the chief instrument of divinization. The three sacraments initiate the candidate into the "mysteries" of the divine order. As matter informed by spirit, they manifest and symbolize, in space and time, divine realities of a superior world.[15]

15. Beggiani, "Christian Initiation in the Eastern Churches," *Living Light* 11 (1974): 546.

11

ESCHATOLOGY

Eschatology speculates on the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation. Christ's work is completed only when creation is restored to its original state. For individual Christians, the focus is primarily sacramental. Baptism and the Eucharist are the pledge of future fulfillment. The imagery for the future kingdom is basically biblical. In fact, while Syriac theology in general manifests a great tension and anticipation of the future world, it provides very little detail of the time to come.

Baptism and the Eucharist are filled with eschatological meaning. They restore the condition of the first paradise and anticipate our future state. Through baptism and the Eucharist humans are joined to the church and are in route to regain their country of origin. They become a pledge of salvation and a foretaste of happiness to come.[1] Ephrem, in the *Commentary on the Diatesseron,* explains:

> We have eaten Christ's body in place of the fruit of the Tree of Paradise, and his altar has taken the place of the Garden of Eden for us; the curse has been washed away by his innocent blood and in the hope of the resurrection we await the life that is to come, and indeed we already walk in this new life, in that we already have a pledge of it.[2]

1. Saber, *Théologie baptismale,* 173–74.
2. Brock, "Mary and the Eucharist," 54.



In the Maronite Sunday office of Compline, the Church is addressed in the following prayer: "Blessed, holy and believing Church! … Advance! Eat the Fire and the Bread. Drink also the Spirit in the Wine! For it is by the Fire and by the Spirit that you acquire beauty and that you enter with your Spouse into the wedding chamber." And in the Matins of Sunday, the office chants: "Blessed are you who sleep, who have departed in the faith, for you have put on the sign of life, from the water; blessed are you, for the body and the blood that you have taken shall resurrect your members from the dust."[3] The third prayer of the morning office of the Sunday of the Faithful Departed petitions: "O God, fulfill your promise of eternal life for the dead who were clothed in your baptism and received as a pledge your body and your blood, for you said to them: 'Whoever eats my body and drinks my blood has life everlasting.'"

The eschatological thrust of the Eucharist is summarized in the *Anaphora of St. Celestine* which declares: "O Lord, grant that our sharing in this Holy Banquet may be a pledge of your unending Heavenly Feast, with your saints and chosen ones."

The Maronite office manifests a tension toward the heavenly kingdom and an "impatient desire" for the second coming. It awaits the heavenly community chanting an eternal liturgy to the "Lamb of God." In the meantime, human life has been transformed in the resurrection of Jesus which inaugurates the resurrection of the dead.

As indicated previously, there is a constant theme regarding the garments of light worn by Adam and Eve and lost at their sin. Baptism is seen as restoring these garments. The idea of a wedding garment for the future heavenly kingdom is also rooted in the Gospel. The Maronite office reflects this eschatological theme. An example is found in the *sedro* of the evening office for the Sunday for the Faithful Depart-

3. Tabet, "L'eschatologie dans l'office commun maronite," *Parole de l'Orient* 2 (1971): 6–25.

> ed: "Also, Lord Christ, we ask that you grant to all those who rest in your hope, who have eaten your body and drunk your blood, to rise to meet you carrying their lighted lamps and dressed in wedding garments, that they be able to rest in the celestial dwellings of the Jerusalem on high."

THE SLEEP OF THE SOUL

The early Syriac fathers did offer a few descriptions of the condition of those who had died.[4] A convenient theory was to say that the dead went into a sleep until final judgment. Jacob of Serugh, in speaking of the wise and foolish virgins, claims that the good virgins sleep with the oil of their good works with them until the day of the Lord. The wicked sleep without oil and will stand and be ashamed on the last day.

In Ephrem's view, the souls of the just reside in delightful mansions on the edges of paradise to await their resurrected bodies.[5] He prays that when he dies he will be found in the "forepart" of heaven, the place before its entrance, until the final resurrection.[6]

Another image taken from the Semitic tradition and found in other religious traditions is the idea that after death one must cross a river of fire. The just are delivered, while the evil are burned. In making this crossing, Jacob of Serugh teaches that help is received from the angels, the mysteries of baptism and the Eucharist, and good works. Jacob petitions, "Let me pass through the sea of fire in a boat of water. May baptism cover me from the burning fire and spread its wings over the fire. May the fountain of living water accompany me." Regarding the Eu-

4. For a study of the condition of the soul after death, see the dissertation of Francis Zayek, "De Psychopannychia in Ecclesia Syriaca" (Ph.D. diss., Pontifical University of the Propogation of the Faith, 1948).

5. Ephrem, *Hymn on Paradise, No. 8,* in *Saint Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise,* trans. Brock, 135.

6. Michael Guinan, "Where Are the Dead? Purgatory and Immediate Retribution in James of Sarug," *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 197 (1974): 542, 547.

charist, Jacob says, "When the odor of your body and merciful blood, mixed in me, strikes the fire, may it pull back from my members." Also, "If the gnashing of teeth approaches me, may your body and blood, the medicine of life, drive it away."[7]



The Maronite liturgy believes that the cross is a bridge over the sea of fire. The *mazmoro* verse preceding the Scripture readings for the Liturgy for the Departed chants: "May your cross be a bridge by which the faithful departed, who wear the robe of Baptism, may be brought to the haven of eternal life."

"COMING TO HARBOR"

A symbol that is frequently used in Syriac tradition to express the future kingdom is "coming to harbor." However, in the East Syriac church it could also be applied to Christ as the "harbor of peace." This latter meaning is connected with the gospel story of Peter sinking in the Sea of Galilee. In fact, in the Syriac liturgical tradition the phrase "coming to harbor" is often extended to Christ, the saints, and the sacraments.

The *Acts of Thomas* view Christ as the haven for those who accept baptism. Aphrahat speaks of the world as a ship directed by just men toward the harbor of rest. Ephrem gives the image of harbor, as well as the metaphors of pilot, ship and sea, an eschatological meaning. Jacob of Serugh sometimes uses the image in speaking of the end of life.[8]



The Maronite morning office for Fridays declares in its first prayer: "Hope of the living and harbor of safety, where all who are weary and troubled by the surging waves and misfor-

7. Ibid., 543–45.

8. Edward Réne Hambye, "The Symbol of the 'Coming to Harbor,'" *Orientalia Chrisiana Analecta* 197 (1974): 404–5.

tunes of this world find rest; grant that we may safely reach your port, the place of eternal rest, with all who have been pleasing to you." The morning office for the Sunday of the Faithful Departed in its first prayer petitions: "Lord, help us to put our hope and confidence in you that one day we may come to the peaceful harbor and reach those who rest in hope; then we will praise and glorify you."

THE FUTURE LIFE

Ephrem, in his *Hymn on Paradise, No. 5,* gives a description of the characteristics of the resurrected body:

A hundred times finer and more subtil is the body of the just
when they are risen, at the resurrection:
it resembles a thought that is able, if it wills, to stretch out and expand,
or, should it wish, to contract and shrink:
or if it shrinks, it is somewhere, if it expands, it is everywhere.[9]

In his *Hymn on Paradise, No. 9,* he describes in detail the vision and source of joy that the just will experience:

Torrents of delight flow down through the First Born
from the radiance of the Father upon the gathering of the seers:
they indulge themselves there upon the pasture of divine visions.
Who has ever beheld the hungry find satisfaction,
fare sumptuously and become inebriated on waves of glory
flowing from the beauty of that sublime Beauty?
The Lord of all is the treasure store of all things:
upon each according to his capacity He bestows a glimpse
of His hiddenness, of the splendor of His majesty.[10]

CONCLUSION

The Syriac church had a deep faith in the completion of the work of salvation and the resurrection of all things by Christ in God.

9. Brock, *Harp,* 23–24.
10. Ephrem, *Saint Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise,* trans. Brock, 145.

The key to the future of the church and its individual members are the mysteries, especially baptism and the Eucharist.

The focus of Syriac thought was on judgment day, and, therefore, it was convenient to speak of the sleep of the dead until that day. On the other hand, there was also the tradition of a perilous journey to be made across the sea of fire with the possibility of falling into the fire because of one's sins.[11] Clothed by baptism, with the Eucharist as medicine of life and the cross of Christ as a bridge, the just will come safely to harbor.

11. Guinan, "Where Are the Dead?" 548–49.

12

FAITH

With the redemptive work of Christ and the action of the Spirit culminating in baptism, faith is engendered in our hearts. The Syriac writers view faith from several aspects.

Aphrahat, having established the teaching that Christ is the rock of faith, declares in his *Demonstration No. 1 on Faith* that Christ the "stone" is the foundation on which our faith is based. Aphrahat, continuing this image, speaks of a structure to be built by the person of faith:

> For first a man believes, and when he believes, he loves.
> When he loves, he hopes. When he hopes, he is justified.
> When he is justified, he is perfected. When he is perfected,
> he is consummated. And when his whole structure is raised up,
> consummated, and perfected, then he becomes a house
> and a temple for a dwelling-place of Christ. . . .
> And when the house has become a dwelling-place,
> then the man begins to be anxious as to that which
> is required for Him who dwells in the building.[1]

In his *Hymn on the Faith, No. 10,* Ephrem declares, "By this truth [baptismal faith], you are able to be united to celestial beings; further, you are united with God and formed in his im-

1. Aphrahat, *Select Demonstrations*, trans. Johnston, in Schaff and Wace, *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* 13:346.

age." In his *Hymn on Nativity, No. 15,* which was cited previously, Ephrem speaks of the relationship of faith and love in terms of a painting. He is reflecting on the signing of the bread by the consecrated blood during the divine liturgy: "Behold Your image is portrayed with the blood of grapes upon the bread and portrayed upon the heart by the finger of love with the pigments of faith."[2] Ephrem develops this idea of the renewal of God's image by teaching that "faith is a second soul. As the body lives only by the soul, so the soul lives only by faith; if the soul entertains negation and doubt, it degrades itself into a corpse."[3]

Ephrem links faith through baptism with each member of the Trinity. He also assures the believer that the Trinity will serve as a protection and support when faith is tested. In his *Hymn on the Faith, No. 13,* he teaches:

I presented my faith to the Father
and he imprinted it with his Fatherhood;
I presented it to the Son and he mingled it with his being
and the Holy Spirit, too, sanctified it and fashioned in it
the mystery which sanctifies everything.
Faith which is not thus imprinted (*rushma*) goes astray.
Let us prepare ourselves for affliction should it come:
though our spirit suffer, our soul be separated, our body burnt,
what can overcome us?
On Three Names hangs our Baptism;
by three mysteries has our faith been victorious;
three names has our Lord consigned to his Twelve,
Names in which we have taken refuge![4]

In a beautiful image, Ephrem describes the gift of faith as ultimately the fruit of the cross, the tree of life. In his *Hymn on the Pearl, No. 4,* Ephrem explains:

2. Ephrem, *Saint Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns,* trans. McVey, 150.
3. Saber, "Théologie baptismale," 56–57.
4. Cited by Yousif, "St. Ephrem on Symbols," 56.

The thief sought to possess the faith,
but the faith possessed him;
and enthroned him in Paradise.
He lives on the cross, this tree of life,
of which faith is the fruit and in place of Adam,
it is he who eats of it.[5]

For the Syriac fathers, faith is essentially a divine gift granted through the redemption of Christ. While human freedom of choice is implied, there is no existential analysis of how the act of faith occurs. As part of the process of divinization, the possession of faith by humans is intended from the time of creation. In this view, the truth of faith is the goal of the human mind, although it is beyond human capacity.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, we can conclude this study as we began, by reflecting on the paradox of the knowledge of faith and the hiddenness of God. While the realm of the Holy is distinct unto itself and radically inaccessible to human reason, God's Word makes the Father knowable, and creation being made through the Word is in its very nature the self-revelation of God. The incarnation is both the fulfillment of revelation and the renewal of the process of divinization. The church and the mysteries continue Christ's redemptive work, and in the sanctifying event itself divine realities are being disclosed. Thus baptismal faith is the climax of what it is to be human in the presence of God and grants angelic knowledge of that reality that must always remain mystery.

5. Graffin, "Hymnes sur la perle," 133 and following.

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